CBW

Number One
For PSV Professionals

COACH AND BUS WEEK 8 March 2006 **Issue 720** £2.50

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THIS WEEK

BTTF special

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Schools operator fights banning orders after vandalism spree **page 18**

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Coach operator shows *CBW* around his amazing new offices **page 34**

Child's play

CBW's Andrew Peace joins the school run with Reynolds Diplomat **page 35**

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We visit Volvo's central European base to see how the Swedish giant went global **page 30**

Slatcher signs up

WA Shearings boss backs our campaign for a fair deal for coaches **page 4**

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Happier days ahead?

In answer to the almost weekly question 'How's coach tourism going to do this year?' I have a predictable answer: I don't know.

The fragility of tourism in general was underlined last year by the July bombings, which brought much inbound work to a standstill. God forbid it happens again, but despite the fact that bird flu has affected a variety of wildlife and a handful of humans, worldwide, there's no betting against a dead swan on the Serpentine causing calamity.

But I talk to a great many operators, and most of the best are saying it's shaping up to be a good season. Early bookings have been good, with an earlier booking pattern, and it seems to most that the domestic market is looking forward to its holiday.

The mountain of debt under which Britons labour is, I understand, mostly on the credit card bills and mortgages of the middle-aged and younger. Those over 55 are more comfortably off, and as they are central to the coach tourism market, that's good news.

My annual visit to BTTF discovered a smaller show - perhaps the result of last year's nervousness - but with the same number of visitors, and a great atmosphere. The 'exit poll' of exhibitors produced some truly ecstatic comments such as: "It was the best show of the last five years."

There seemed to be great commitment on the part of buyers; many of the companies I intended to talk to were simply too busy with customers for me to get a word in edgeways. And while on the subject, many thanks to all those who came to see us on the *CBW* stand, bouquets thankfully outweighing brickbats!

Coach tourism faces challenges from all directions, but it is a fact that imaginative, forward-thinking, marketing-led operators have proven not just resilient but are reaping rewards. I'm quietly confident that the industry's back on track.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

COACH TOURISM COUNCIL
Promoting Travel and Tourism by Coach

ABC

British Travel Trade Fair
1-2 March 2006
NEC, Birmingham

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Big guns back CBW campaign

WA Shearings boss throws weight behind call for Fair Tax, not Fuel Tax

John Slatcher, MD of WA Shearings, is backing our campaign for coaches to enjoy the same fuel tax rebates as every other form of public transport.

In an interview with CBW's Andrew Jarosz, Mr Slatcher said the industry could be more competitive with rail and air travel with a reasonable tax benefit, and agreed with other operators that the 'red diesel' option wouldn't work because of the need for refuelling away from base.

"Passengers using any other form of public transport benefit from their operators not paying fuel tax, but we get penalised," he says. "This measure could level the playing field considerably, and make us more competitive."

Mr Slatcher said that the government is the loser, as many of his continental tours deliberately pass through Luxembourg, where fuel is the cheapest in Europe at 60p per litre at the pump: "Luxembourg is the cheapest, and you will find that many of our tours pass through there," he said.

"You could say that if diesel was cheaper in the UK we would buy more here, and the exchequer would benefit from more VAT."

Peter Shipp, MD of EYMS, is also backing the *CBW* campaign. Mr Shipp is talking to two MPs to persuade them that the coach industry is getting a raw deal on fuel. In a recent letter, Mr Shipp told them that coach operators pay five times the fuel tax of bus operators (after rebates) and *seven* times that of the rail industry.

"Thus the least well-off, generally the people who use buses and coaches, suffer the highest rates of duty," he told the MPs.

Mr Shipp also pointed the finger at air travel, which pays no duty at all on its fuel yet produces some of the highest emissions of any transport. Low-cost air travel is seen as having caused more damage to the overseas coach travel market than any other factor.

CBW editor Mark Williams said: "Last week, we carried a letter to Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling MP setting out our case. I hope operators signed and sent the letter. If you need a copy, contact me directly.

"We will also be making the letter available on-line at *www.cbwnet.co.uk*. Peter Shipp and others are talking to their MPs, and I suggest other operators follow their lead.

"It is vital that this campaign gets the impetus it deserves.

"For too long, coach passengers have been treated unfairly by excessive fuel tax, not only of the price they pay, but also because the effect of this unfair fuel discount for the coach's competitors is having a serious effect on the ability of operators to provide services.

"We have no intention of letting this issue rest until we get reasoned answers from the Department for Transport and the Chancellor, but so far their response to our campaign has been a deafening silence."

John Slatcher

Who pays what?

Air	Nil
Train	6.44p/litre
Bus	9.14p/litre (after BSOG)
Coach	47.1p/litre

Where to refuel abroad

Country	litre
Luxembourg	60p
Spain	63p
Austria	67p
Poland	67p
Belgium	72p
France	72p
Switzerland	74p

Selwyns takes over Hardings

Selwyns Travel in Runcorn, Cheshire, has bought Hardings Tours of Merseyside, creating a 75-coach company with a turnover of £11m, and 225 staff.

The deal, for an undisclosed amount, was concluded on March 1 after two months of negotiations.

Selwyns Travel managing director Selwyn Jones told *CBW* there might be more acquisitions in the future: "We are still looking to expand. It was important with Hardings finding a company with the right fit, in terms of location and work profile. We will always look at suitable opportunities."

The existing Hardings depot at Liverpool will remain as the main operations centre for the fleet of 12 vehicles, and will be run as a separate division within Selwyns Travel. All staff - and the name Hardings - will be retained.

The company now has four operating centres: its main base in Runcorn, Manchester Airport, Huyton (Hardings) and it runs a fleet of six Technobuses on behalf of Merseytravel from St Helens. Mr Jones says these centres will most likely stay as he wants the business to keep its local input, although some functions like accounting and human resources may be rationalised.

Selwyns runs a modern fleet of DAF Van Hools, with an average age of less than three years. Its oldest vehicle dates from 1995. Hardings typically runs Scanias. Mr Jones says he will be investing in vehicles, and the Hardings business, to reinforce its position on Merseyside, especially as the Liverpool 'Capital of Culture' year approaches in 2008.

Passengers on the 010 National Express service from Cambridge to London can go online

Surf and ride

Customers using the National Express 010 London to Cambridge route, operated by Burtons Coaches, now have access to a super highspeed broadband internet connection.

The route, which now includes a stop at Canary Wharf, will carry Telabria's mSystem MobilAP-3G, a multi-radio system that combines an 802.11b/g Wi-Fi access point with the 3G data.

Gerry Price, head of engineering for National Express, said: "We are very excited about the potential of this trial and the benefits it will bring to our customers, particularly those on busy commuter routes. But it's not just the business community who will benefit - mobile communication is increasingly being seen as a pre-requisite by a wide variety of travellers on the move."

The National Express trial provides internet access to passengers for free, but the Telabria system enables operators to charge for internet access on a tariff of their choice, thereby generating an additional revenue stream. It also supports a range of third-party 3G data cards and networks.

Ninety-five per cent of all notebook computers are now sold with integrated wireless support.

Campbell joins MCV as MD

Former Transbus manufacturing supremo Steve Campbell has joined MCV as its new managing director.

The announcement was made as *CBW* went to press on Monday night. Former managing director Jim Boswell becomes vice chairman of the Cambridgeshire-based bus manufacturer. Mr Campbell is charged with developing the company's manufacturing base. Most recently Mr Campbell has been working in an engineering capacity with the Comfort del Gro subsidiary Metroline, in London.

"We have ambitious plans," said Mr Boswell. "We are not going to be a small player. We are delighted Steve Campbell has decided to join us as managing director, leaving me free to work on strategic issues."

MCV is currently engaged in refurbishing 50 Stagecoach double-deckers from London, and employs 35 people finishing its Evolution bus range.

Mr Boswell said it has a short term target to produce 125 full-sized vehicles and is developing, with Irisbus, its low-floor Logo platform.

Mr Campbell said: "It was clear when I saw the factory that MCV needed a change in performance, and I will provide help for the next phase of its development.

"It's a great challenge and, culturally, the current management team at MCV and I think alike."

Briefly

A new bill called Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups will come into effect in 2007 and will mean employers hiring un-vetted staff to work with children will be liable for £5,000 fines, or five years in jail. The new system will also allow employers to make secure, online checks on prospective employees. The CRB system will not change. People cautioned for sex offences, and not just those convicted, will automatically face a ban on working with children.

A controversial Education Bill will mean local authorities will have to give free transport for children to attend any of three suitable secondary schools within two to six miles of their home – rather than just the nearest, as now. The Bill also gives all staff in schools the power to discipline pupils even when they are not in school, and detention can be imposed on weekends.

Derbyshire operator Trent Barton is reportedly considering an Oyster Card-type scheme on its bus services. The company told the BBC that the changes were about making the bus services quicker by speeding up boarding times, and giving passengers a better value service.

Police are looking for four youths after a lump of metal was thrown from a bridge through the windscreen of a decker bus in Edinburgh. No one was injured but the driver, who was hit by the object, was badly shaken. This is the latest in a series of similar incidents in the area.

VOSA says its will close its online services to operators from March 10-12. Traffic Area Offices will also be without IT systems. The aim is to allow VOSA's IT suppliers, Atos Origin, to take over responsibility for the former Traffic Area Network's IT services from Computacenter. VOSA says its services will be back by 0700hrs on March 14.

Thumbs up for TfL

Transport committee praises London's bus system

Andrew Peace, news editor

A London Assembly Transport Committee report last week delivered a ringing endorsement of the way bus services are operated in London, although its recommendations for improvements have all been rejected by Transport for London. There are however signs that TfL's love affair with bendy buses may be coming to an end.

In the chairman's foreword to the report, Roger Evans AM says: "The committee found that Transport for London has achieved value for money, principally through the application of strict reliability standards through the Quality Incentive Contracts (QIC) regime. London now has a larger bus network than any other comparable international city and passenger numbers have grown by 500 million since 2001."

The report applauds TfL for stimulating increased competition in the market by seeking out other operators like National Express and NCP but says: "The committee expects to see greater competition facilitated by TfL in the coming years and encourages greater transparency in the awarding of contracts, as far as is commercially viable."

In conclusion, the report says that: "The expansion of the bus network, levered through the implementation of the QIC mechanism has, it would appear, been able to stimulate successfully and meet demand, keep contractual costs down and improve reliability.

"He [the Mayor] and London Buses have largely delivered, via an expensive but ultimately effective contractual mechanism. Operator profits are not excessive; contract costs have been kept down through competition rather than operators keeping driver wages low; the fleet has been renewed and demand stimulated."

In response, Clare Kavanagh, director for performance for London Buses, said: "The Committee's report again underlines the fact that the investment in the London Bus network has produced a major boost to the reliability and capacity of the network and has done so whilst providing excellent value for money.

"After the report late last year from the National Audit Office and Audit Commission this is yet another vote of confidence in the mayor's transport strategy and TfL's delivery of it."

In response to the recommendations, TfL said all London bus drivers must now undertake a BTEC qualification and that the DSA's assessment shows that standards are rising each year; that contracts already include incentives (fines) to maintain ramps; and that key factors in awarding contracts are operator performance and value for money.

The committee recommended that:

- **Bus driving standards and wheelchair ramp performance should be financially rewarded along with reliability**
- **Performance league tables for bus operators should be improved**
- **Greater transparency in the tendering process for contracts. TfL should explain in greater detail decisions to choose a bid that was not the cheapest and there should be an increase in the average three bids per route**

London Buses has hailed the report as 'yet another vote of confidence in the mayor's transport strategy'

Bendy buses rethink

"Bendy buses are still on trial," said Ken Livingstone last week. "We have only had them for three years, so the jury is still out and they may be withdrawn."

Bendies serve 12 out of TfL's 700 routes. The mayor says the buses are effective on short routes in Central London, but acknowledged there were problems on longer routes where they block junctions.

The Committee said: "We also welcome reassurances from TfL – and most recently the mayor – that articulated buses, while suitable for some high frequency routes, are not seen as a future option for most of the capital's bus services." London Buses says that bendies will remain a "relatively small part of the total London fleet." TfL says: "The whole bus network is always under review to make sure that we are providing the right level of service to London's changing population. There are no routes currently earmarked for immediate conversion to, or from, bendy buses."

The jury's out for bendy buses in London

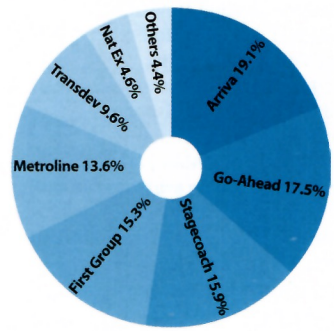
Who is on the London Assembly Transport Committee?

The committee is made up of nine London assembly councillors, chaired by Conservative Roger Evans AM, with Geoff Pope AM (Lib Dem) as deputy. In total there are three Conservative members, two Labour members, two Liberal Democrats, one Green Party member and one 'One London' member.

The committee's remit is to scrutinise "transport matters of importance to Greater London". Its terms of reference for the bus contracts scrutiny were: to examine the value for money of the Quality Incentive Contracts issued by London Buses, by examining the QIC's penalty/bonus element; the operator rate of return/market share; and the criteria by which value for money should be judged. Secondly, it should compare all of the above to other cities in the UK, and abroad.

Key statistics included in the report:

- **Subsidy to London buses has increased from zero in 1997/98 to £555m in 2004/05, representing an annual subsidy of almost £200 per household in London**
- **London (6,800 million passenger km) has the biggest bus network of a "selected" number of international cities, vastly bigger than second placed Paris (5,100 million), Hong Kong (4,300 million), New York (2,700 million), Los Angeles (2,300 million) and Madrid (2,200 million)**
- **Passenger journeys have increased from 1.3bn in 2001 to 1.8bn in 2004/05**
- **Contract costs have remained flat over the last four years, between £4.20 - £4.30/ km**
- **The network has increased by 26% since 2001**
- **The percentage of contract costs paid out in bonuses has gone from -2% in 2000/ 01 to 5.1% in 2004/ 05, forecast to rise to 5.6% in 2005/06**
- **London Buses' data shows that the average return for London operators is 8%, as against 12.3% for operators in PTE areas, and would likely be lower in the future**
- **Excess wait time has been halved in the last five years**
- **The percentage of km lost to staff shortages has reduced from 1.3% in 2001 to 0.1% in 2005.**
- **London (60%) lags sixth behind Frankfurt (82%), Dublin (75%), Madrid (72%) Strasbourg (68%) and Copenhagen (65%) in terms of operating costs covered by revenue (source Colin Buchanan Associates)**



Operator's market share in London (at April 1 2005)

What the operators said

As part of its investigation, Colin Buchanan Associates, transport consultants, interviewed the heads of three London operators on behalf of the committee.

Mark Yexley, managing director of **Arriva London**, says the QIC system works "fantastically well" for passengers, and for bus operators and TfL. He says reductions of 10% in contract price have concentrated operator's minds on delivering a quality service, and that operators had not initially realised the extent to which improvements in quality were possible.

He says the market has now moved from healthy growth into a climate of fierce competition, due to new operators like NatEx entering the market.

He is reluctant to see driver quality brought into QIC because it was hard to measure objectively, and that reducing insurance costs was a strong incentive for operators to improve driver quality.

Tony Wilson, managing director of **First Group (London)**, says the introduction of QICs has concentrated operator's minds on operating a bus service in the interests of passengers for the first time in many years - previously companies had been keen to ensure that buses were on the road, but not necessarily providing a good level of service.

He says that operators factor bonus payments into their tenders and is therefore concerned about an investigation of bonus levels.

He agrees that competition in London is fierce but says that is down to competition between existing operators. For instance, having lost bendy bus route 25 to Stagecoach in June 2004, First bid competitively for subsequent contract tenders. He says the competition is good for TfL, but not necessarily good for keeping operators interested in the London market.

Dai Powell, chief executive of **CT Plus**, the trading company of Hackney Community Transport which at the time of the interview ran three TfL routes, says the market is phenomenally competitive, as evidenced by CT Plus failing to win contracts for the past few years. He noted that operators observe which routes TfL is monitoring at any particular time and focus their energies to give good performances on those routes. He feels there should be additional checks on reliability at times outside of the normal monitoring.

He is very positive about the changes to the London bus network, particularly reliability, which he says is much better than other parts of the UK.

Briefly

Northumberland County Council is holding a public consultation about withdrawing its discretionary home to school transport subsidy. It needs to save £34m over the next four years and has turned its attention to the £600,000 a year it now pays to transport 700 pupils to religious schools. It says any changes will not be made before September 2007 and that the changes would be phased in, with current pupils funded until they change schools. The consultation ends in May and a decision is expected by July.

A Japanese government minister has visited Brighton on a public transport fact-finding mission. He met council officials and representatives from the highly successful Go-Ahead owned Brighton and Hove Bus Company. The BBC quoted a councillor as saying: "It's exciting that representatives from the government of Japan, a country renowned for its technological innovation, are interested in what we are doing here." The officials also visited Manchester, Nottingham and London.

Local government minister David Millibrand is touring the country over the next month consulting local authorities on a fundamental reorganization of local government. He apparently has the 34 two-tier authorities in his sights initially but the review is expected to extend to all authorities in the long term, taking in all functions like health, housing, schools and transport. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will publish a Local Government White Paper in the spring.

In what is believed to be her last appearance as a transport minister, Karen Buck opened a redeveloped Newquay Airport last week. The £2.8m project includes improvements to the Cornwall airport's road network and new drop-off areas for buses and coaches.

Truronian reaches new heights

Biggest ever expansion for Cornish independent

Andy Roden, south west correspondent

Cornish independent operator Truronian's fleet and staff numbers are at record levels after being awarded a lucrative National Express coach contract, and long-term deals for new bus services in the Camborne area.

The news marks the single biggest expansion in the company's 19-year history. Precise details of the bus contracts are being finalised - but Truronian will be ordering new buses to operate them. The company has received a number of new vehicles in recent years, including a fleet of Optare Solos. Until a clearer picture emerges of the duties required, Truronian is unable to confirm what type of buses it is ordering.

It is able to confirm, however, the arrival of a pair of Volvo-chassised Plaxton Panther coaches. These are likely to find use on the Newquay-London route for National Express, which starts this month. Though currently the only contract Truronian has with National Express, it has run contracts before, and is also used on a spot-hire basis for extra services at busy times. Truronian says it will be bidding for more NX work as it comes up.

Truronian general manager Graham Gilbert told *CBW* the firm is having few difficulties in recruiting the 25 new drivers needed for its additional work. By the time its recruitment drive is complete, the firm will have more than 200 staff, and a 92-strong fleet including 12 coaches and 52 buses.

"We're really positive about things at the moment," said Mr Gilbert. "We're going to expand further. We think we've got a really bright future."

With the new contract, Truronian now has more vehicles and staff than ever

Anger at crime victim insurance plans

The Federation for Small Businesses reacted angrily last week to government plans to make businesses' insurance policies pay for compensation to workers who are victims of crime.

The Home Office consultation document, "Rebuilding lives - supporting victims of crime", aims to simplify the Criminal Injuries Compensation System (CICS) and make compensation claims paid to victims quicker and easier. But the FSB says it is against any moves which would make obtaining employers' liability compulsory insurance more difficult and more expensive, particularly since it says 25% of small firms already find it difficult to get this cover, and 58% of them have been victims of crime this year.

David Croucher, FSB National Crime spokesperson, said: "Small firms have already been hit very hard by rocketing insurance premiums in the recent past. To expect them to pick up the higher insurance premiums that will result from these proposals is unacceptable. It would be a terrible double blow for a small firm to be a victim of crime and then have to pay extra for that dubious privilege."

The FSB is Britain's biggest business organisation with 195,000 members, for more information see *www.fsb.org.uk*

Arriva subsidiary The Original Tour won the inaugural chairman's Special Achievement Award at Ukinbound's annual awards ceremony this year, despite passenger numbers falling by 40% after the July terrorist attacks

European growth pays off for Arriva

Group reports £107.9 million profits

Organic and acquisitive growth in mainland Europe bus and rail operations helped Arriva deliver an impressive set of results last year. The group maintained profits in its first full year without its Northern rail franchise, despite rising fuel costs.

With acquisitions, during the year, costing £46.3m (most of it spent overseas), Arriva has confirmed its role as a major European player, with turnover doubling over the last three years. With the other three of the big four groups maintaining interests in North America, Arriva has grown its European operations to the point where turnover is not far behind its original core bus operations in the UK.

Results for the year ended December 31, 2005 show that group turnover dropped 7.5% from £1.76 billion to £1.63 billion, largely due to the loss of the UK rail business, and operating profits fell 2.5% from £126.3 million to £123.1 million, with more than half of it coming from UK bus operations.

The group's pre-tax profits after goodwill, exceptionals and finance costs was £107.9m compared with £109.3 million a year ago, and after a smaller tax deduction, the retained profit for the year rose 3.6% from £83.3 million to £86.3 million.

More than half of the operating profit (£68 million) came from the UK bus division, with the margin falling from 10.2% to 9.7%. Turnover in the UK rail division, which now only covers Arriva Trains Wales, fell from £509 million to £239.4 million with operating profit falling commensurately from £31.9 million to £14.9 million. But in Europe, where both bus and rail businesses are operated, turnover rose from £525.6 million to £621.2 million, with operating profits rising from £35.1 million to £48 million. The Arriva Bus and Coach business fell slightly in both turnover (£13.8 million to £13.1 million) and profit (£3.2 million to £3 million), while the vehicle rental division, which was sold this year, showed a reduced turnover (£59 million to £55.6 million) and operating profit (£12.6 million to £10.1 million).

In London, Arriva remains the largest bus operator, although its tourism and sightseeing passengers fell by 40% in the peak summer months following the terrorist bombings. Within the whole of the UK, fuel costs rose by £6m, and the hedging for 2006 will add a further £14 million to the cost. The group is claiming better patronage and reliability in Durham, Thurrock and Medway, following partnerships with Local Authorities, which brought in new vehicles and route networks. A similar five-year programme is now under way in Merseyside.

Delivering his last set of results, retiring chief executive Bob Davies said that the acquired businesses were delivering profitable growth. "Arriva now has significant opportunities for further strategic investment in Europe."

Bus acquisitions costing £6.9m in the UK included Sovereign operations in Stevenage, and Blue Bus assets in Bolton. Overseas purchases included bus company Sippel in Germany for £11.6m and 80% of SADEM in Italy for £9.5m. Increases in shareholdings included RAG in Germany for £3.8m, SAF in Italy for £4.3m, SAIA in Italy for £5.2m, and deferred consideration for SAB of Italy for £4.3m.

In addition tender gains increased operations in Helsingborg, Trelleborg and Malmo, while Arriva remains the largest operator in Denmark. In Spain, operations in Galicia were sold for £7m, and the group is appealing against a decision by the Portuguese competition authorities preventing a joint-venture with Barraqueiro in the Lisbon area.

SUMMARY

Year ended 31 Dec	2005 £m	2004 £m
Turnover	1,626.8	1,759.0
Total operating profit	123.1	126.3
Pre-tax profit	107.9	109.3
Retained profit	86.3	83.3
DIVISIONAL RESULTS		
UK Bus		
Turnover	697.5	651.5
Operating profit	68.0	63.6
UK Rail		
Turnover	239.4	509.0
Operating profit	14.9	31.9
Europe		
Turnover	621.2	525.6
Operating profit	48.0	35.1
Bus & Coach		
Turnover	13.1	13.8
Operating profit	3.0	3.2
Vehicle rental		
Turnover	55.6	59.0
Operating profit	10.1	12.6
Central costs	(16.6)	(13.6)

World

A three-day general bus strike in Malta last week was called off after the Public Transport Association backed down. It was claiming the government had withheld some of its subsidy. The PTA gave up the 50,000 lira (£80,000) it was demanding on top of the government's Lm1.25 million (£2 million) subsidy offer for last year, and accepted a proposal to reform routes into groups, with a rotating system of drivers.

Smoking at bus stops in the Australian state of Victoria is now illegal – but the Bus Association of Victoria says that the ban will be very hard to police because of a lack of ticket inspectors. Every covered bus stop now has a non-smoking sign installed. Drivers themselves have not been instructed to try and enforce the ban. Smoking at pubs and clubs will be banned from next year.

Toyota Motor Corporation subsidiary Hino Motors' fuel-cell bus has just entered service at Nagoya airport. The firm, which makes a range of buses and trucks, has just entered the UK truck market, and is expected to take over the now defunct Foden dealer network.

Broward County in Florida is to spend $10m over the next five years making its 5,000 bus stops accessible. It was facing a civil law suit for not meeting federal accessibility standards, 16 years after the American Congress adopted disability rights legislation.

The Tasmanian Green Party has pledged $1m towards the cost of installing seatbelts in school buses if it comes to power in the forthcoming election. "Given that it is a legal requirement for everyone to wear seat belts in cars it is ludicrous that our children on buses are not given similar safety precautions," the party says. It will also ensure that a static rollover threshold test is adopted.

Bournemouth's Yellow Buses vacated its Mallard Road depot last week after occupying the site for over half a century. The coach and bus operator, recently taken over by Transdev, immediately moved to a new £5 million site in nearby Yeomans Way. The new four acre depot has room for 120 buses and 20 coaches.

Government backs biofuels... eventually

Having initially lagged behind, the government is now taking the lead on the use of biofuels, and will shortly announce further measures on its Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO). The government also announced it is lobbying the European Union to bring the transport industry into the carbon trading scheme.

Speaking at the Low Carbon Vehicle Conference last week, transport minister Stephen Ladyman MP said: "We are showing real leadership on this one (RTFO). No other country has introduced such stringent requirements, and we hope that the UK scheme will lead the way internationally." He added: "You won't have to wait long to hear the next key decisions on the future of RTFO."

Currently the RTFO says that 5% of all fuel should be from a renewable source by April 2008. The government is keen to see the level rise beyond 5% as quickly as possible, but, says Ladyman: "As we move past 5%, it will be up to biofuel producers to meet the challenge of supplying consistently good quality fuel, and the motor industry will also need to play its part in ensuring that vehicles can run at higher blends."

He also revealed that the government is lobbying the European Union to include transport fuels in its Emissions Trading Scheme. The week before last three cabinet ministers, Alistair Darling, Margaret Beckett and Alan Johnson, wrote to the European Commission asking it to accelerate work in this area, and offering the UK government's help. Carbon trading imposes CO_2 emissions limits on businesses and allows trading of the allowances between businesses that can fulfil their obligations and those that cannot. The allowances become progressively tighter year-by-year. The scheme was introduced as a way to meet the Kyoto Protocol.

The scheme currently includes high-emitting industries like power generation but does not cover aircraft and other forms of transport. The UK government, supported by British Airways, successfully lobbied the EU to include aircraft emissions in any future expansion of the scheme at the end of last year. A Commission spokesperson says that it was unlikely that any new industries could be included in the scheme before 2010.

Factory revamp for Holdsworth

John Holdsworth, the fabric manufacturer, has announced a radical reorganisation at its factory site at Shaw Lodge Mills in Halifax. The company says the move is being taken in order to secure the future of the business.

The owners, Bradford-based Hanson Partners and Leeds-based property developers St James Securities, are submitting a planning application to Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council to redevelop part of the 10-acre site.

John Simpson, managing director of John Holdsworth, says: "We live in rapidly changing economic times, with new and demanding challenges. This planning application, which leaves all options open, is the first step in trying to secure the future of the company and the site. Both are an integral part of the fabric of life in Halifax."

2006 Dublin show will be biggest ever

Gabriel Conway

Business is booming for Ireland's Coach & Bus show, which will take place at the RDS in Dublin on November 24 and 25 this year.

"We had a very successful show in 2004, but this one is going to be even bigger," a spokesman for the show's organisers, the Coach Tourism & Transport Council (CTTC) told *CBW*. "The show will have 20% more floorspace than the 2004 one, with between 75 and 90 exhibitors, depending on the final configuration of the remaining space."

Visitors at the 2004 Coach & Bus show in Dublin. This year's event promises to be even bigger

"We currently have confirmed bookings for 75% of the space, and are in negotiation for much of the rest, so it looks like we are going to be sold out very early this year. Many of our previous exhibitors have asked for more space this year, and we will also be welcoming some new manufacturers and other businesses to the show."

The event, held every second year at the RDS showgrounds in Dublin, is close to the city centre, and situated in one of the main hotel districts, with an express coach link from the airport run by First Aircoach. The show has proved popular with UK visitors in the past, and many of the manufacturers and dealerships have reported interest and orders from UK customers while at the Irish show, in addition to a growing volume of business from Irish operators fuelled by the country's strong economic growth.

In addition to the show itself, the CTTC will again host its popular gala dinner at the nearby Jurys Hotel, which will include an evening of dancing and entertainment, including traditional Irish performances. Tickets for the gala dinner and entertainment will include a shuttle link from the show, and are available for €75 (£50).

■ Full details of Coach & Bus Ireland 2006 are available from the CTCC website: *www.cttc.ie*

Bus Eireann wins Ryder Cup contract

Bus Éireann has secured an exclusive €1.3 million (£890,000) contract to plan and manage the transportation for the Ryder Cup, which is being held in Ireland for the first time this September. A significant part of the transport requirements will be subcontracted to independent operators in the area.

The company will be responsible for planning the movement of the approximately 40,000 spectators set to descend on the K Club in Straffan, Co Kildare, each day of the event. More than 90 double-decker buses and 245 coaches will operate for the duration of the event, from September 22-24.

The contract was awarded to Bus Éireann by Ryder Cup Travel Services Ltd following a competitive tender process.

A spokeswoman for the company told *CBW*: "Bus Éireann welcomes the opportunity to be involved in such a prestigious event. It is a major undertaking and Bus Éireann is one of the very few companies with the experience required to plan and manage transportation for an event of this scale."

In 2003, the company successfully oversaw the transportation for the Special Olympics and in 2004, was responsible for the movement of up to 4,000 Gardai during the visit of US President George Bush to Ireland.

More than 300 buses and coaches will be used for the Ryder Cup's Irish debut

KVC's Sprinter conversions are 'the business' says Paul Morton

Sprinter wins over Mortons

The rapidly growing bus and large coach operator Mortons of Rathfarnham has expanded into the mini executive hire market following the agreement of contracts with a number of North American-based clients, which will see the firm providing luxury 17-seaters for golfing, corporate reward and executive hire contracts.

Seeking a vehicle that could fill this demanding role, owner Paul Morton turned to KVC of Kilbeggan, who have just delivered the first of two 17-seat Mercedes Sprinter minicoaches which will form part of a major fleet upgrade and expansion in 2006.

"This is the first time that we've gone into this segment of the market," Morton told *CBW*, "and we're absolutely blown away by the quality of the product, and the attention to detail in sales and service that KVC have given us. Everything we wanted in terms of customisation was available, the answer was always yes, and when the first coach was delivered last week we didn't find any snags despite a thorough inspection. She just came back from her first hire, down to Limerick, and the driver says he felt like he was driving a new car."

"The guys at KVC can definitely look forward to doing business with us again in the future," he added.

The Sprinters, based on the extended version of the Mercedes chassis, seat 17 in comfort with full aircon, entertainment system, overhead luggage racks and 3-point seatbelts.

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

SCOTLAND

An operator in Scotland says fuel price rises and the concessionary travel scheme are to blame for his company going into liquidation.

Mallard Weir's Tourlink ceased trading on February 17 following a petition presented to the courts by the commissioners for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Director Dennis Noble told *CBW*, "We could no longer sustain year on year fuel price increases. In just this last 12 months fuel has increased by 27% - few companies can bear rises of that sort. I've fought long and hard for BSOG to be applied to coaches, so far without success.

"The other thing is free concessionary travel - the day tour market has been decimated over the last three years, since the introduction of the scheme in Strathclyde. It was a big part of our business. Maybe not this year, but probably next, when the full concessionary travel scheme starts in Scotland, we will see a lot of coach operators badly affected."

Weir's Tourlink did a wide variety of work from tours and day tips to schools and private hire. All contracts were allocated to other local firms the day after the company ceased trading.

The company ran 12 vehicles and employed 28 staff.

Another Scottish operator has also ceased trading, though this time shutting down voluntarily.

T Paterson and Brown, of Kilbirnie in North Ayrshire, specialises in British and continental tours and blames the downtime during the winter season, as well as the sheer number of rules and regulations existing and predicted in the industry. The owners are believed to be approaching retirement age.

School services in Dalmuir, West Dunbartonshire, were plunged into chaos last week after fire engulfed a local depot.

The blaze, at **PJ Coaches**, destroyed 11 coaches and forced the evacuation of a nearby block of flats. **McCalls Coaches**, which shares the premises, could not get to its undamaged vehicles as police evacuated the area within a radius of 500m due to the presence of acetylene cylinders.

NORTH

One of the oldest-established coach operators in the North West is packing up, not because of profitability, but because there is now 'too much red tape and hassle' with the probability of more to come.

G Barlow & Sons Coaches of Oldham can trace its roots back to the 1860s, and is owned by the family firm, which is now the largest funeral director in the town.

Managing director David Barlow said that the small seven-coach business was in the process of closing down, and the coaches, mostly Dennis Javelins purchased new, were in the process of being sold.

"I'm looking at pictures of solid-tyred coaches on the wall, and we operated horse-drawn coaches and hansom cabs before that." said Mr Barlow. "We couldn't sell the business on, because we need to retain the business name, so we have to close it."

He said that around four or five staff would face redundancy, because they couldn't be absorbed into the rest of the business. "It's not profit margins or competition that's forcing us out, it's that there is just too much hassle in running coaches."

Established Oldham firm G Barlow & Sons has called it a day

Local Government minister **Phil Woolas** came under fire over the implementation of the concessionary travel scheme on a visit to Tyneside last week.

He says a working group has been set up to try to find a way to plug the £5.4m hole in **Nexus'** finances, but sparked outrage when he suggested that local councils could make up the shortfall themselves.

He said: "I recognise there is a very real problem in Tyne and Wear. I am working hard to find a solution.

"The difficulty is we can only provide money to local authorities and transport authorities within the law. We can't just take money out of the government's coffers.

"It may be that, given the extra money we have been able to find, that councils may be asked to contribute towards a solution.

Briefly

Nexus has announced it is extending its Metro saver ticket to the controversial Quaylink service, at a cost of £15,000. The supposedly cash-strapped PTE has also been in the local news recently for donating a few thousand pounds to decorating a bridge in the city with multi-coloured lights.

A 75-year-old man died last week after being hit by a decker he had just got off in Manchester. The road was closed for five hours while investigations were completed at the scene.

"I am not saying this is necessarily the case but it is time to be pragmatic."

Newcastle City Council has received an extra £1.5m through the local authority business support initiative which, says Mr Woolas, could be rediverted into the CT scheme. But the council's deputy leader, Councillor John Shipley, said: "This is a mess of the government's making and they need to find a solution. It made a promise to introduce free travel for pensioners and should honour it.

"The money Mr Woolas is talking about is earmarked for business support purposes and he should not be suggesting local authorities use money earmarked for other purposes."

WALES

The **Stagecoach** depot in Pontypool will close at the end of April after losing all of its school contracts. The bus operation will transfer to the company's Cwmbran depot, but the coach side of the business is under threat, with redundancies possible.

A Stagecoach spokesman told *CBW*: "Despite very competitive tenders we were unsuccessful in retaining existing or winning new school contracts with Torfaen County Borough Council. Around 40% of turnover at the Pontypool depot is linked to school contracts, and taking this work away makes the operation not viable. Therefore the depot is expected to close at the end of April.

"We are putting arrangements in

London transport commissioner Peter Hendy unveils a plaque in recognition of CentreComm

Briefly

The Orbital bus service in Norwich will be free on Thursdays in March in a bid to drive up patronage. The distinctive purple bus, introduced last November, has been building numbers steadily, but nowhere near the 5,000 passengers a week it needs to be commercially viable. Numbers currently stand at around 1,000 passengers a week.

place to transfer existing stage-carriage work to the Cwmbran depot. The coach work at Pontypool is not viable so we are looking at the potential to transfer remaining work to another depot. We are currently consulting with staff and the TGWU about the employment issues. We have to react to the current business environment, but we are doing everything we can to relocate staff and transfer work to other parts of the business."

The Pontypool depot has 20 vehicles and 34 staff. Stagecoach bought the company, previously called Phil Anslow Travel, 14 months ago.

SOUTH EAST

Sittingbourne-based **Chalkwell Coach Hire** has taken over the 326/327 service formerly operated by Arriva, which links Sittingbourne and the surrounding villages to the Medway towns. The service is subsidised by Kent County Council.

Three ex-Ulsterbus Wright-bodied Dennis Darts were acquired from Wealden PSV to operate the service.

The vehicles have also been fitted with GPS trackers, supplied by Pinpointers. Chalkwell operations manager Roland Eglinton said: "We recognise the fact people want buses that are punctual and reliable and with the tracking system we can monitor exactly where our buses are, and where they have been to a very accurate degree. We can even tell when the bus doors are opened and closed.

"We are delighted to have been awarded this service as it compliments our existing network very well."

London's transport commissioner **Peter Hendy** unveiled a plaque last week in recognition of the role CentreComm - London Buses' command center run in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police - played in keeping the capital's bus network moving in the wake of the terrorist attacks last year.

He said: "Although the efforts of certain individuals on July 7 last year have been recognised both by the general public and also in the New Year's Honours list, it's important to remember that no one individual alone could have achieved what CentreComm did on that terrible day. The entire team pulled together and made sure Londoners had a way to get home. This plaque is one small way to show our appreciation to the team for the tremendous effort they put into their work."

Chalkwell has taken over the 326/327 service from Arriva

Roadworks

M74 Hamilton
Until May 12: Roadworks and contraflow both ways at J5 A725 (Raith Interchange)

M8 Renfrewshire
Until May 10: Delays expected and slip road onto motorway closed on M8 Eastbound at J28 (Glasgow Airport)

M6 Cheshire
Between 2100 and 0500hrs until March 31: Entry slip road closed during the night on M6 Southbound at J21A M62 (Croft Interchange)

M55 Lancashire
Until March 31: One lane closed both ways between J3 A585 (Kirkham) and J1 A6 / B6241 (Fulwood)

M1 Derbyshire
Between 2100hrs and 0600hrs until April 8: Exit slip road closed northbound at J29 A617 / A6175 (Chesterfield / Mansfield)

A40 Gloucestershire
Saturdays and Sundays until March 19: Road closed on A40 both ways between Huntley and Birdwood

M4 South Wales
Until April 13: Speed restriction of 50 mph eastbound between J40 A4107 (Port Talbot) and J39 A48 (Margam On Slip)

A1(M) Hertfordshire
Between 2000 and 0600hrs until June 14: Two lanes closed and speed restriction of 50 mph both ways between J6 A1000 / B656 / (Welwyn / Welwyn Garden City) and J7 A602 (Stevenage)

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon)

A39 Somerset
Until May 21: Road closed between B3135 and A37

A38 Devon
Until March 24: Speed restriction of 40mph both ways between Drybridge and Lower Dean junction

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TOUR

Carry on coaching in the Dales

Park boss pledges commitment despite budget freeze

Operators planning visits to the Yorkshire Dales have been reassured that a budget freeze imposed this year will not impact on coach facilities in the holiday hotspot.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is facing a lean time in the next few years because of an effective cut in its government grant. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) supplies the majority of cash to the nine National Parks in England and it has frozen the £4.9 million grant that the authority received in 2005/06 at the same level for the following two financial years.

Carl Lis, the chairman of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, said: "To date, the authority has been in a healthy state financially with no real problems, but all that is about to change.

"The freeze will mean that our work will suffer. On top of the projects and service for which we are responsible, we are committed to nationally negotiated pay scales, including annual increments that we will also have to fund.

"It means that a number of budgets for different projects will be frozen or reduced in order to achieve these savings. We rank our work in order of priority and money is allocated accordingly. As a result, high priority areas such as biodiversity, farm conservation, rights of way and green lanes will be largely unaffected.

"However, a number of lower ranking projects that we would like to deliver - such as public transport and traffic management - will stand still."

Despite the gloomy financial prognosis, officials in the Yorkshire Dales were quick to point out to coach operators and drivers that they did not foresee any reduction in the facilities available for visiting coaches.

Furthermore, coach parking will continue to be free at the sites in Hawes, Kettlewell, Clapham, Grassington and Malham. Also, it was stated that there were no plans to charge for coach parking in the future.

A free guide for coach drivers is available that helps them plan visits and tours and underlines the fact that the coach parking is within easy walking distance of the main facilities and points of interest. In most cases, toilets are available - some with facilities for the disabled - and a National Park or Tourist Information Centre is nearby.

The guide also gives details of the categories of roads in the Yorkshire Dales so drivers can be advised of those that carry coaches and those that are unsuitable.

■ Free copies of the guide are available from the Hawes National Park Centre on 01969 666210 or email: *hawes@ytbtic.co.uk*. Alternatively, the guide may be downloaded from *www.yorkshiredales.org/grouptravel*

Line glancing: Michael Stephens busy explaining to another operator how the new booking system works

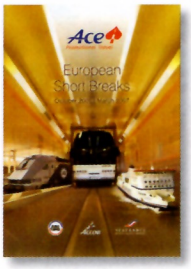
Operators check out Accor

Accor Hotels reported keen interest in its new web-based tool, Groups Online, which it launched at the BTTF show. The new system allows operators to go to *www.accorhotels.com* and check real time availability and rates. It follows on from the 2001 launch of Accor's off-line booking tool, GR2000.

Michael Stephens, Accor's director of global leisure sales, said: "I was very pleased by the response from operators, a good many of whom realised that this was an invaluable tool for them to use in planning holidays.

"This new programme allows our customers to go online, check availability and select from one of the hotels listed. It also gives general information about the hotel and you can also print off a map for driver directions."

Ace start to new business



Ace Promotional Travel has reported a brisk start to business with 288 group tours booked in the first six months of the year.

Managing director Maurice Jasper set up the company last year with the aim of selling holidays direct to operators. Accor Hotels, Eurotunnel and SeaFrance were contracted to supply the ferry and accommodation elements of the holidays.

He has reported that 58 tours have already gone and the other bookings are confirmed or in the process of being confirmed. It was a very good start to operations, added Jasper, and he was sure that the product would grow as more people became aware of it.

Jasper added: "I have always felt that this is a product that the industry has been waiting for and that has been born out by these booking figures. It is a very good trend in only six months of business and I am confident that this growth will be maintained.

■ For more information about the tour programme, call 0845 838 1993 or email: *info@acept.co.uk*

How operators should cope with bird flu

Much has been written about how the country is going to grind to a halt when the population is struck by avian flu. However, despite the dead cat in Germany and dead swans in France, as yet the disease has shown no signs of hopping across the Channel.

Now this may be a scare without foundation but it pays operators with a lot of money invested in tours to plan for any eventuality. To that effect, tourism officials in the Heart of England have come up with an action plan.

The wider potential impact of avian flu initially will be the effect on consumer confidence following negative media images of the countryside and businesses associated with the tourism industry. It is hoped to avoid a repeat scenario of the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 that led some visitors to cancel accommodation, trips, tours and visits to attractions - mostly because they were not aware of the facts.

If a customer wishes to cancel a booking, operators are advised that the key point to make is that avian flu is a disease in birds not humans and that the government and Chief Medical Officer have confirmed that it is safe to visit the countryside and attractions where there are birds such as nature reserves, stately homes and gardens, zoos, children's farms and wetland centres.

If a customer remains adamant about cancellation, the issue of the rights and responsibilities of both parties need to be clear. Foot and mouth highlighted the importance for accommodation providers and visitors of clarity in booking conditions so that both parties fully understand their rights in terms of cancellations/booking conditions, etc.

If an accommodation operator can settle the issue in a common sense way that also retains their relationship with a prospective guest, it would make sense to do so.

■ For more information, contact the Heart of England Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support on 0845 241 8269.

Guiding lights: tourism staff push the boat out to launch the Bristol guides

Shaping visits to Bristol

Destination Bristol has launched the city's tourism guides for 2006 to support a new campaign to boost visitor numbers to Bristol. The new publications build on the success of 2005, which saw more encouraging signs of growth in the city's tourism economy.

In line with VisitBritain's marketing strategy, the three guides target what VisitBritain claim are the three market segments with the most growth potential - leisure breaks, business tourism and the visiting friends and relatives sector.

Bristol - The Guide 2006 is the main guide for leisure break visitors, offering an introduction to the city's arts and culture, the historic harbour and the surrounding countryside, as well as featuring a full range of accommodation in Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset.

The Pocket Guide 2006 is a guide to Bristol including days out in Bath, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire and provides details of attractions, eating & drinking, the arts, shopping, sport & leisure and major events.

Bristol & the West of England Venue Guide provides an in-depth guide to the diverse venues that Bristol and the West of England has to offer for a variety of occasions, including conferences, exhibitions, meetings, accommodation, product launches, seminars, training and weddings.

"It's an exciting time for tourism in Bristol. The industry is really working well together to make the most of the city's assets and to pull together the whole tourism product for the visitor. Bristol offers an unbeatable mix of attractions which gives the area a unique feel and make it one of the UK's best short-break destinations," said John Hallett, managing director of Destination Bristol.

Make hospitality your priority, urges Earl Spencer

Earl Spencer has urged the travel and tourism industry to focus on "hospitality" and "professionalism" to help boost the UK's £74 billion visitor economy.

Speaking as guest of honour at the 2006 BTTF last week, the Earl admitted that his grandfather had been 'very reluctant' to open his stately home, Althorp in Northamptonshire, to the public.

But he told visitors: "My father was very much more of a people person." Although conceding that Althorp's approach to tourism marketing at the time was "sometimes slightly amateurish."

"What I have tried to do is introduce a more professional approach. We continue to welcome people - indeed, one of the high points for me is that the staff at Althorp are always highly praised by our visitors - but we are taking a more professional approach to increase sales."

The Earl added that BTTF was an important event in so far as it allowed people to do business face to face. He said that too often, the technology of the day means that people communicate by email or other means and never meet the person they are addressing. BTTF allowed people to do business in a much more personal way.

He told his audience: "I hope that all of you will do all you can over the next couple of days to build on those fantastic tourism revenue figures."

He was referring to remarks made by Tom Wright, the chief executive of VisitBritain, who told delegates that income from overseas tourism alone would this year hit a record £14.5 billion. Domestic tourism is worth around five times as much to the national economy.

Earl Spencer stressed the need for personal contact as he opened BTTF 2006. Right: visitors at the NEC

Demi-paradise for coach groups

It was smiles all round for council and tourism officials in one area of Cumbria when Eden District Council was presented with a Coach Friendly Local Authority award from the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT).

The award was set up by the CPT to recognise the contribution that a destination makes to make coach-borne tourists feel welcome, and the criteria includes good facilities for coaches and their passengers, clear and concise information for drivers and group organisers, and coach friendly parking and traffic management policies.

Nominations for the award are made through the CPT regional structure and then voted on by operators, drivers and their customers. Although not strictly one 'town', the judges felt this year that the efforts of all the destinations included in the award - Penrith, Kirkby Stephen and Appleby - had made a collective effort to encourage coaches despite each destination not being a 'large' or high profile destination.

The award was presented at the British Travel Trade Fair by Brigid Simmonds, Chair of the Tourism Alliance, the cross industry stakeholder group, to Councillor Malcolm Smith, Chairman of Eden District Council's Community and Economy Committee.

The CPT's Allan Edmondson explains why Eden Valley won the award before Brigid Simmons made the presentation to Cllr Malcolm Smith

He said: "I am delighted to collect this award on behalf of Eden District. Town Councils, local partnerships and visitor attractions in Appleby, Kirkby Stephen and Penrith have gone that extra mile to really offer an attractive service to coach operators and their customers, highlighting the ingenuity of Eden's tourism industry in being able to cater successfully for different market sectors."

Allan Edmondson, the CPT's Head of Coach Services, said: "This year's winner is well deserved because it is an excellent example of how neighbouring towns can work together to promote their area as a first-class coach destination.

"They have recognised that the coach trade can bring considerable business to shops, restaurants and visitor attractions."

John Featherstone, the chairman of CPT's National Coach Parking Committee, said that the importance of the Award could not be overestimated.

"This award is about recognising the efforts local authorities are prepared to make to encourage coach tourism. This market is worth a total of £2 billion per annum and CPT members were keen to ensure those that made a significant contribution to the success of the product were suitably recognised."

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BRITAIN
relax
connectEngland
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HOSTEL
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enjoyEngland.com
NARROWBOAT
ibis

Burning issues: the stage hosted forums on both days. This session examined the problems operators face with new developments and legislation

Mapping out the capital

The new London Coach Parking Map 2006 was launched by Visit London on the opening day. The map is a joint venture between the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and Transport for London, which has made great strides in recent months to improve its coaching credentials.

Each driver is urged to have a copy of the map as, apart from the obvious information, it also reminds drivers of other matters such as emissions, use of microphones and congestion charges.

For example, there are regular random exhaust emission tests, along with general checks on the roadworthiness and general condition of coaches.

Leaving the engine running while parked remains one of the largest causes of complaints about coaches in the capital. Drivers are reminded that leaving the engine running is breaking the law and drivers could be fined.

As for microphones, drivers are reminded that they are not allowed to use any kind of microphone or telephone handset while the vehicle is moving, except in an emergency.

Bob Pilbeam, the CPT's Coaching Consultant, said that the launch of the map was another example of the CPT working with key organisations for the benefit of the coach industry. "This has proved to be an extremely useful tool for drivers visiting the capital and I would urge every operator to make sure that all their drivers have a copy," he said.

■ Copies of the map are available from the CPT on 020 7240 3131 or it may be downloaded at *www.tfl.gov.uk/vcs/coach-parking*

John Featherstone , chairman of CPT's National Coach Parking Committee presents the new London Coach Parking Map to Hannah Collingbourne, of Visit London (centre) flanked by Ann Wilson of Historic Royal Palaces and Darek Podwiazka, coach manager for Transport for London

The Albatross Travel Group launched a new answering service for operators

Albatross has the answer

A new answering service was launched by the Albatross Travel Group to help coach operators cope with customers' queries day or night. It allows operators to divert their phones to an out of hours service whenever they need.

The service offers access to a real person at Albatross's UK call centre 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Messages and information are forwarded immediately by email and there is an option for calls to be answered personally with the company name. If the message is urgent, the company's contact information is given out or the company may be contacted direct.

Management service information will include the date, time and duration of each call, the caller's name and reason for call and details of how and when they can be reached.

Albatross is offering operators two payment options. A Pay As You Go service has no time limits or set up costs and there is no monthly subscription fee. Operators are billed be the second at £1.30 a minute.

Alternatively, operators may opt for a dedicated service that offers a personalised out of hours office and calls answered with the company name. There is a one-off set up fee of £20, a daily management fee of 66p and calls are billed by the second at 90p a minute.

Sean Taggart, the managing director of the Kent-based wholesaler, said: "We are always thinking of new ways of helping our coach operator clients and we think that this will be really beneficial. It will save the operator time and money because it would cost them a considerable amount of money to set up such a service off their own bat."

■ Interested operators should register with the Albatross Travel Group and they will be sent a simple set-up pack. Call Sue Duffy on 01732 879191.

Of course, the stand to be seen at was CBW's. Editor Mark Williams said: "Thanks to everyone who dropped in to see us. Our 10 issues for £10 offer was a great success."

Botel's Euro bargains

Operators on the lookout for bargain breaks checked out the Botel stand - next to the bar as is customary - where the Rotherham wholesaler was offering four-day packages to Gent in Belgium from only £69 per person.

Gent - A Tapestry of Flanders departs on a Friday and comprises return short-sea crossing from Dover to Calais and three nights' bed and American buffet breakfast accommodation at the four-star Holiday Inn Gent Expo.

The hotel, which has recently refurbished its restaurant and bar areas, is a short drive from the city centre and has on-site coach parking. It is next to a new tram stop and coach groups can take the 15-minute ride into the centre. An all-day ticket costs three Euros (£1.96).

The £69 rate per person is based on sharing a twin room and applies to departures from April to September. It drops even further to £66 a head from October to March 2007.

Botel was also promoting summer savings at Disneyland Resort Paris that included three night, two day packages for the price of two nights and hotel upgrade.

As an example, a three-night package based at Disney's Newport Bay Club normally costs £220 per person but the three for two saving brings the price down by £75 to £145 per person, based on two adults sharing. The rates apply to arrivals on May 1, 2 and 7.

Three night and three day packages are also on offer for the price of two nights and two days.

Prices for arrivals in April, May, June and September cost £138 per person based on two sharing a room at the Sequoia Lodge.

All prices include short-sea ferry crossing, buffet breakfast and hopper tickets to both parks, subject to capacity.

The hotel upgrades may be combined with these packages, representing even greater savings. For example two adults sharing would pay £102 per person, a saving of £81, by upgrading from the Hotel Cheyenne to the Sequoia Lodge for May 8 and 9 arrivals.

■ For more information call Botel on 01709 703535 or email: *sales@botel.co.uk*

The popularity of Pride & Prejudice shows no sign of waning

Pride of place in BTTF awards

Pride & Prejudice Country won the BTTF's Excellence in Public Relations award for its imaginative and practical campaign marketing the film's venues.

The initiative focuses tour operator attention on two main regions - Derbyshire and Lincolnshire - where the majority of the Keira Knightley film's atmospheric scenes were filmed. But, said Lincolnshire Tourism's Karen Hickerton, it doesn't ignore the TV series starring Colin Firth.

Such is the success of the campaign, a coach operator familiarisation visit organised for April 7 to 9 sold out within a week. At the BTTF, a groups guide was also grabbed by eager operators as soon as it went on display; with every one soon gone.

Among attractions included in the current film are Chatsworth, Red House Stables Working Carriage Musuem and North Lees Hall and Haddon Hall, in Derbyshire, plus Burghley House in Stamford, Lincolnshire, and the market town of Stamford itself. Further south, Wilton House in Salisbury and Stourhead Gardens in Dorset are also in the film, while locations used for the BBC series are also promoted.

"Pride & Prejudice can be a day trip or a very useful length four-day mini-tour," said Karen Hickerton, who is providing groups with a range of support options including itineraries and suggestions of group hotels: "We will even help with the booking, and then keep details of coach tours available to the public so that when we get inquiries from individuals, we can direct them to a relevant operator," she told *CBW*.

■ Full details at *www.visitprideandprejudice.com*, or via Lincolnshire Tourism on 01522 526450, or email Karen direct at *karen@lincolnshiretourism.com*

■ **OTHER winners of BTTF Excellence Awards were:**

Overall winner **Heart of England Tourism**
Most effective first-timer **Eden Project**
Most effective stand for business **Visit Scotland**
Most effective stand personnel **Yorkshire's Magnificent Attractions**

'Talking guidebook' linked to GPS

Automatic commentary tied into a GPS navigation system was one of the few 'nuts and bolts' items at the BTTF.

Turning Points - which already counts WA-Shearings among its customers - is building a massive count of destinations featured in its Soundscape system, and is expecting to have the UK 'taped' by the end of the year.

So far, the company has concentrated its efforts on ensuring all the sights along major coach routes through Europe are included on the system, and has the M25, M2, M20 and other routes into the UK in its list of commentaries. But the rest is coming soon.

The 'intelligent' system not only begins the relevant commentary at a point triggered by GPS, but 'knows' the speed and direction the coach is going, ensuring passengers are looking out of the correct side of the vehicle at precisely the right time. If the coach gets stuck in traffic, the system extends the commentary to keep their interest.

"The rest of the time, passengers get one or two minutes of information - this is supposed to be entertainment, not education," says director Ian Walsh. Mr Walsh said a complete system - either using a 'palm' computer supplied by the operator, or a specialised hard drive - takes just two hours to install.

"A 'palm' PDA computer costs only around £200 and has the advantage that it can be carried from coach to coach," he said. But he added that the more powerful hardware could store much more commentary.

Turning Points - which has won three major awards for innovation - charges the operator for the amount of commentary delivered, making it pro rata with the use the system is getting.

■ Contact Turning Points at the website *www.soundscapeexperience.com*, or by telephone on 01795 411535

The CPT's main players were out in force at the BTTF

ATOL for BCH members

Bonded Coach Holidays will be able to offer its members ATOL bonding for flight-based packages this summer.

BCH owner the Confederation of Passenger Transport has reached an agreement with the Civil Aviation Authority on Small Business ATOLs, which cover a maximum 500 air-based holidays per year. Under the terms of the new agreement, the protective umbrella of bonding is to be split between BCH - providing refunds for failed members with ATOLs - and the CAA organising repatriation of holidaymakers, funded by BCH.

"CPT is the first trade association to have reached an agreement," said BCH manager Karen Hudson. "It is a big step forward for the coach holiday sector and its many customers.

■ CPT's CoachMarque scheme, represented at the BTTF, has managed to hold steady on membership numbers, said its manager Allan Edmondson.

"I'd like more operators to enrol, of course, but those who are in have stayed in because they get value from being able to use the accreditation in marketing," he told *CBW*.

CoachMarque is awarded to operators who have been through an audit of business practise and fleet. Mr Edmondson said the CPT is looking at marketing the scheme itself very heavily this summer to drive further business to members.

For more on the 2006 British Travel Trade Fair, don't miss *Out & About*, free with next week's *CBW*

Redwing's marketing manager Keith Payne gives visitors the lowdown

Redwing's new baby gets booked

Redwing had the distinction of being the only coach operator at the show, bringing its new Mercedes-Benz Tourino into the NEC.

The 34-seat coach - which visitors said looks like a large coach which has shrunk - attracted a stream of admirers, one of whom booked £5,500-worth of business with marketing manager Keith Payne.

"He was looking for a vehicle to carry corporate clients to lunch at a French chateau, and didn't hesitate," Mr Payne told *CBW*. "The general comment is that the Tourino is a 'proper coach' rather than a converted truck, and customers have been particularly impressed with the rear 'continental door' which gives a proper width alternative entry or exit point."

Brunel's genius is being celebrated in Bristol next month

Brunel provides the bridge for Bristol

This summer's Brunel 200 event is expected to attract thousands of people to the area from its launch on April 8.

A massive firework display which will be launched from the Clifton Suspension Bridge, to light up the estuary is anticipated to attract 100,000 spectators, while the summer-long celebration of Britain's most famous engineer will include three exhibitions in the city.

Brunel's Nine Lives explains Isambard Kingdom Brunel's brushes with death at the height of the Victorian industrial age, and is set at the Maritime and Heritage Museum, next door to the SS Great Britain. The Forces Behind Brunel is a hands-on science exhibition staged at AtBristol - the modern visitor centre which has proven hugely popular with schools groups.

Art of the Industrial Age, an exhibition of painting and sculpture from Brunel's era, runs until June.

Steaming cruises for Brunel

Tours near Bristol and South Wales can hitch a ride on two pleasure cruisers during the Brunel 200 event.

The *Waverley* and *Balmoral* are sailing up and down the Bristol Channel from Bristol, Clevedon, Penarth, Porthcawl and Swansea Ferryport in June to September on a series of day trips, visiting many of Brunel's creations in the area including the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Steam train journeys are included in a whole package of imaginative excursions, with Waverley Excursions offering an absolute minimum 10% discount for even small groups. Typical full prices include an afternoon cruise from Bristol through the historic docks, past SS Great Britain, under the suspension bridge and through the Avon Gorge. Disembarkation is at Clevedon Pier with a return coach shuttle provided, all for £18.95 adults and £9.50 for children.

■ For more information about the cruises at *www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk* or call 0845 130 4647.

Schools operator fights ban

Firm hit with 20 prohibition orders in three years

Traffic commissioner David Dixon

David Doyle

A school bus company could lose its license after 15 vehicles were taken off the road for being unsafe.

A public enquiry heard that Susan and Brian Kerslake of Castell Coaches and Euro Coach Travel were given 20 PG9 prohibition orders in three years for the coaches. These orders banned their buses from the road until the problems were fixed.

But the couple, who also have a contract with National Express, claim most of the faults happened just before the buses were checked or were caused by vandalism.

What the vehicle inspector said:

Vehicle inspector Robert Mitchem said the prohibition orders had been lenient at times.

He said: "I am aware there are difficulties with vandalism on the school contracts which is why in some cases I only gave a PG35 (less serious) prohibition order.

"But there are concerns as to whether the operator has the ability to maintain the vehicles to a satisfactory condition."

Mr Mitchem said roadside checks on both companies had resulted in 20 PG9s in three years. The majority of these orders banned the coaches from driving once they got back to the operating station but two orders took them off the road instantly.

He said: "46% of coaches stopped in roadside checks for this operator have failed."

Addressing roadside checks on Euro Coaches he said: "The first vehicle was littered and there was a pack of six beers in the driver's foot-well that were not secured.

"A check in Stratford-Upon-Avon found a cut in the fabric of a tyre more than 25 millimetres long and the breaker cords were damaged. A mobile check in Somerset also found a deep cut in the tyre of another vehicle."

Other problems were worn down tyre treads, damaged breaker cords and inoperative direction indicators.

Commenting on Castell Coaches' roadside checks he said: "Nine coaches were checked that run to St Cenydd comprehensive school.

"In the first one the emergency break-glass hammer was missing from its usual place. When asked the driver didn't know where it was - it is the law the hammer is in the right place. On the second bus at St Cenydd a wheel nut was loose. There was a screw in the tyre tread and the tyres had been checked six days earlier. The next check at the operation centre found the brake actuator excessively corroded - when tapped the corrosion crumbled away leaving a hole."

Other damage was vandalism to the interior, inoperative direction indicators and excessive dirt.

Mr Mitchem said: "Some of these vehicles were particularly dirty which is an incompatible condition for a public service vehicle."

He said there were suspicious circumstances around the company's maintenance inspection records.

Mr Mitchem did a surprise inspection at the operating centre on November 2 and found some maintenance records were missing.

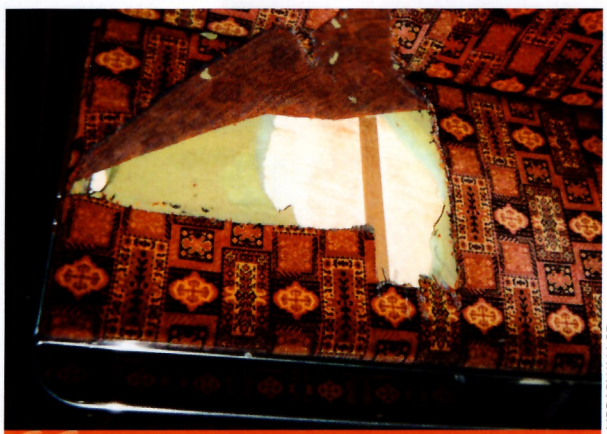
"The company has a chart which shows their maintenance inspection dates," he said.

"Those that have been done are circled in red. The wallchart was up to date at the time of the visit - but a check of maintenance questions its accuracy. There were maintenance records marked on the wall chart that were not available for me to see.

"It is possible that this was because the vehicles had been taken off the road - it is also possible that the records weren't completed when the checks were done."

When Mr Mitchem returned to collect the records a few days later he found some of the missing maintenance reports were now filed.

"Additional papers were later filed but on a different style of paper," he said. "The missing records were completed retrospectively."



LIBRARY IMAGE

> "In 2003 we hardly got any prohibitions – then in 2004 it rocketed. The reason for this? The school contract"
>
> Brian Kerslake

What the operator said:

David Niven, defending the companies, said Mr Mitchem was making a very serious and unfounded allegation.

He explained that if the company had wanted to forge the documents then surely they would have used the same type of form.

Senior mechanic Alan Morris said he did not know Mr Mitchem had been unable to find the documents.

He said: "I did not know Mr Mitchem was coming back to collect the documents and I did not know he thought there was anything missing.

"If we get a vehicle in we would take the maintenance record out of the file and keep it on my desk until all the work had been done. The documents were then refiled after the work had been completed."

Mr Morris also said the prohibition orders were largely

LIBRARY IMAGE

Key points

- **Senior mechanic Alan Morris said high levels of vandalism by schoolchildren were a main reason for the PG9s being issued**
- **The enquiry was adjourned by traffic commissioner David Dixon, who said many of the PG9s were not vandalism-related**

down to faults occuring just before a roadside check, or vandalism by school kids.

He explained the missing fire hammer was removed to stop children smashing windows with it on the company's school contracts. He said: "With the emergency break glass hammer it was kept in the front because if it was kept in the usual place it would be nicked.

"We normally keep it in the driver's side in line with his view - the driver of the vehicle that got stopped didn't know where it was because he was new. If it wasn't there the kids would be smashing the windows in - something we've had before."

Mr Morris went on to say the company has to spend a huge amount of time repairing vandalism damage from schoolchildren at the St Cennyd comprehensive.

"The kids are always ripping the seats up and throwing them around. Unfortunately we are in a world of Stanley knives and felt pens - they cut the covers open and pull the foam out.

"I have to repair a dozen covers a week. They burn the seatbelts - I have to replace 50 of those a month. Seven of the prohibition orders were from vandalism by the kids."

Mr Morris told the enquiry that Mr Mitchem's spot check on his fleet of coaches had happened when they were short-staffed.

He said: "We had one guy away on the sick and another guy who had been with us for seven years had just left. We had taken on some part-time work but we were will still working much harder."

Transport manager Brian Kerslake added he was starting to downsize the company to focus on local contracts.

He said: "If you go back six to nine months ago we had 20 vehicles but 75% of those were very old. The long term plan is to downsize to twelve vehicles between the two companies and to focus on local contracts.

"It's obvious there was a problem because we kept getting prohibitions and something had to be done about it. But in 2003 we hardly got any prohibitions - then in 2004 it rocketed. The reason for this? The school contract."

What the traffic commissioner said:

Traffic commissioner David Dixon adjourned the enquiry while he makes his decision. He told Brian and Susan Kerslake: "Though some of your prohibitions were vandalism related a lot were not. A prohibition rate of 46% from road-side checks is alarmingly high."

He said he would consider limiting their license to 16 vehicles and merging the two companies.

Don't get your fingers burnt

On April 1, your fire certificate will become invalid. Are you ready?

Stuart Darlington

On April 1 the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Regulations will come into force, changing the current fire safety regime, and rendering all existing fire certificates null and void. The new regulations will also require the majority of businesses to carry out a fire risk assessment and comply with its recommendations or face hefty fines or even a prison sentence.

The current regime

There are over 100 items of legislation that relate to fire safety, although the two main pieces of legislation are the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (as amended), which requires employers to carry out a risk assessment, and the Fire Precautions Act 1977, which requires a fire certificate in respect of certain premises. The new regulations will either repeal or amend the majority of this legislation and effectively replace it with a new single risk assessment-based approach.

The new regime

Fire certificates will no longer be valid and risk assessments will be required along with the implementation of any works, procedures and requirements that they recommend.

The duty to carry out a risk assessment and implement any recommendations is placed upon the 'responsible person'.

The responsible person is:

- The employer, if the place of work is under its control;
- The owner of the premises (for example where unlet and/or vacant);
- The person in control of premises in connection with the carrying on of a trade, business or undertaking.

There may well be a fair degree of overlap, for example in commercial premises with common parts where the responsible person for each let part will be the tenant and the landlord will be the responsible person of the common parts. The parties then have a duty to co-operate with each other and co-ordinate their activities to comply with the regulations.

The responsible person has a duty to 'relevant persons' - any person lawfully on the premises; and any person in the immediate vicinity of the premises who may be at risk from a fire on the premises.

The responsible person must also nominate a 'competent person' to carry out the requirements under the new regime and failure to do so will amount to a breach of the regulations. The competent person must have suitable training and experience so they can carry out the duties of the responsible person.

There are many duties upon the responsible person. They need to carry out fire risk assessments and take whatever action and carry out any works, and install any fire precautions that the assessment recommends. The assessment must also be reviewed and kept up-to-date, especially after any works or alterations have been made. The assessment should be a living document and should continually evolve and be held under continuous review. The information from the assessment must also be recorded if there are five or more employees.

They must make sure that all employees are trained (during working hours) in fire safety procedures and provided with all necessary fire safety information and details of any fire escape procedures. Their training should be kept up to date and renewed where required (i.e. after any material alterations to premises or escape routes, etc). Fire wardens should be appointed, together with competent persons (who have had suitable training) nominated to help with evacuations, contacting emergency services and to carry out other duties of the responsible person.

Stuart Darlington is a commercial real estate lawyer in London law firm Davenport Lyons.

Penalties

The price for not complying with the new regulations ranges from a fine of £5,000 to an unlimited fine and two years imprisonment. However, it will of course be a defence to any prosecution for breach of the duty to comply with the new fire regulations if it can be proven that that all reasonable fire safety precautions were taken

In view of the penalties, compliance with the new regime is a serious requirement for the responsible person, but caution must be exercised over the choice of risk assessment contractor.

The responsible person must ensure that the contractor employed is both properly qualified and competent, as compliance with the regulations is dependant upon the contractor on whom they rely. The choice of a poor contractor may not be a defence against any action for failure to comply with the new regulations and the payment of a high fee is no guarantee of adequacy.

Send your letters to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to: Inbox, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

Dial 999 for Stagecoach...

I am not a professional member of the passenger transport industry, but at the same time I can claim to be a minute fragment of the most important segment - a passenger.

A lifetime enthusiast, I am fortunate in being able to read *CBW* once the distribution list within our local bus company has been honoured, a process which takes months, rather than weeks.

So it has happened that issue 694 (September 1, 2005) has only just come in to land.

My wicked sense of humour took instant control while reading the Manufacturer Profile on Alexander Dennis and the line: "Home orders include 12 fire engines, 121 Dart SLFs and 80 Tridents for Stagecoach." How would Stagecoach use their 12 fire engines? Would they take to the road in corporate stripes? Was our far-sighted Mr Souter anticipating privatisation of the fire service? Well, I only asked...

Fred York
Fareham, Hants

DVLA is targeting wrong people

I refer to the letter from David Gladwin ('Suddenly I'm a white van man', *CBW*, February 22) and his experience with the mindless incompetence of the DVLA. I have had similar experiences where the harder you try to pay your dues and comply with the law the more difficult little petty officials become.

The nature of the problem David highlights is perfectly portrayed in the ridiculous and doubtlessly expensive TV campaign 'The DVLA doesn't need to look in your drive etc....to find your vehicle untaxed'. Perhaps not, but while they hound the law-abiding with ever increasing and pointless regulation, why should we advise (with SORN) a government agency that our private property is on our private property? Those outside the law laugh at them more and more loudly.

You do not need to be a genius to work out that if you register and insure a vehicle in your correct name, but under a real but completely unrelated address, the chances are that you will walk through the whole system virtually untouchable.

You can MOT the vehicle and tax it to minimise any chance of being stopped and then drive through as many cameras at whatever speed you like, or park wherever you wish and they cannot find you!

Even if you were to be physically stopped it is very unlikely that anyone would seek to prove that your vehicle's registered address is correct so long as you can remember it and provide your name.

I have been made aware of this by regular correspondence to both my home and business addresses (and to those of others) relating to offences committed by vehicles registered to those locations in the names of individuals and businesses that have no connection whatsoever with them.

The penalties being accrued and summonses unserved are numerous and although I/we notify the authorities including the DVLA I doubt that the offences are pursued. No agency has ever called to the addresses to make enquiries.

The DVLA database is thus as accurate as the information the crafty crooks provide; from digital tachographs to ID cards they are ahead of the game.

The relentless process of turning this country into a police-regulated state is of growing concern to most lawful-thinking people, the fact that so many of those doing it are demonstrably stupid while being generously paid by the public (pensions!) they regulate just puts the icing on the cake.

It is not funny any more.

Martin Judge,
Poole

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Here in Southampton, we have an area of the city centre where many of the local buses stop. It's Pound Tree Road. Just think what might happen under conversion to metric units (*CBW*, March 1): Will it be Kilogram Tree Road or, more likely, Euro Tree Road? After all, money does grow on trees, or so some would have us believe. I feel sorry for the people whose surname is Miles. Are they to be renamed Kilometres by statute or by deed poll?

There have been suggestions that Britain's continued refusal to join the euro will result in calls for bringing back older currencies, such as the groat. Our friends up the road in Winchester tell us that King Alfred says his buses are not that old!

Pete Davies,
Passenger Transport Team,
Southampton City Council

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

HOT TOPIC
How are you planning for digital tacho, which starts in May?

No connection to UK Travel Solutions

You have published a number of articles relating to the unacceptable trading practices of a Blackpool-based company called UK Travel Solutions.

I would like to assure your readers there is no connection between the Blackpool company and my company, Travel Solutions of Belfast Ltd, which this year is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

Peter McMinn
Director, Travel Solutions of Belfast Ltd

Spotted...

Eric Stobart is the latest *CBW* reader to send us a picture of a bus in a far-flung place and – would you believe it – it's another Routemaster. The famous old bus may have been dumped from London's streets, but its appeal lives on – with this one turning up in the Falklands – looks like the passengers wanting Piccadilly Circus are in for a long trip. Keep those photos coming...

Motts
W200 MTT

Motts' long haul

CBW editor Mark Williams is the first journalist to 'officially' visit Motts of Aylesbury, and finds out just how far an iron will and determination can get you

Ever since 1982, when Roger Mott took over from his father as managing director of Motts Coaches of Aylesbury, it has been his aim to get new, purpose-built premises.

Lat year, the company achieved its shared dream, and having sold its old Stoke Mandeville depot, moved on to its new site at Stocklake in Aylesbury. It was worth the wait.

Sited right behind the main Buckinghamshire County Fire Station, it is one of the newest buildings on the trading estate, with the main offices at the gate, and the working parts of the site tucked very neatly behind, almost hidden from view.

Spread across 2 ½ acres, it's a very spacious site, easily capable of swallowing the 45-vehicle fleet. More importantly, I've rarely seen a better-equipped depot - it would be an insult to call it a 'yard'; it's block-paved!

Roger comes down to greet me in the front waiting room, which smells sweetly of fresh carpet tiles and coffee. He's cheerful, and leads me to offices which most publishing companies would die for.

"We've worked hard to achieve this," he tells me as we gaze across the site from his office window to the new workshops and bus wash. "It's been planned since 2000."

What wasn't planned was that Roger would be in the business at all. He had a variety of jobs including a stint as a waiter in the merchant navy: "In the late 1960s when dad was running the business there was no opportunity for me to join the business. It was really cut-throat in those days.

"But to be honest, it never occurred to me anyway - I had no interest in coaches at all. I suppose I had a service-orientated background but I had - still have - no engineering skills. That said, I've always enjoyed a challenge."

In truth, although father John founded the firm back in 1951, he isn't a died-in-the-wool coachman: "I'd say dad is a secondhand car dealer at heart," admits Roger, explaining that for about five years in the late 1950s, John sold all the coaches and set up a car dealership. Coaches only came back to Motts in 1963 after the motor trade went through a rough time.

Ten years or so followed as Motts built its fleet and reputation, and then Roger - at a loose end - joined the family business, followed by his brother, Chris, a year later. Steadily, Roger and Chris absorbed the principals of running coaches until, in 1982, Roger took over as MD with Chris as operations director. Things were about to change.

Together with their engineering supremo Ian Scutt, the brothers began to make some changes and some acquisitions. The original site just outside of Aylesbury, admits Roger, never really had adequate planning consents, so the purchase of the old Oxford Bus garage in Thame was followed by a move from the old site.

Then Motts acquired Dicksons in Stoke Mandeville, which included the old Walls depot, thus producing a combined 40-vehicle operation, then run between the two sites. A further acquisition in 1989 of the J&K Coaches yard near Bicester was used relatively briefly as a satellite depot, and has just been sold for development.

"We always knew the Stoke Mandeville site was valuable as it is in a residential area," said Roger. "But moving was subject to finding a suitable replacement for all three. It was torture running a big fleet in cramped facilities and across multiple depots, but the truth is that local authorities just don't want coach operations anywhere. We're about as popular as scrapyards."

The search took a look at a variety of possible brown-field development areas including a 500-acre ex-military site: "The wrong side of town," Roger says.

Then in 2002, the perfect patch of land behind a bakery came up at auction, and Motts decided to go for broke.

Roger Mott

Timeline

1953 The first motor carriage company formed by Sidney 'John' Mott
1958 John Mott sells coaches and goes into car dealing
1963 John Mott resumes running coaches
1973 Roger Mott joins his father's company
1973 Roger's brother, Chris, joins the family firm
1977 Ian Scutt joins Motts
1978 Motts begins a coach tour business
1982 Roger Mott becomes managing director
1983 Motts moves to Thame to an old bus garage
1985 Motts buys Dicksons of Stoke Mandeville
1989 Motts buys J&K Coaches, based near Bicester
1990 Motts sets up Yellow Bus
1995 Motts sells Yellow Bus to Luton and District
2005 Motts Travel moves to new depot in Stocklake, Aylesbury

"We were friendly with a local developer, and put a deal together with him that he would buy our old site and move us over here. There were the usual planning issues, so it's taken us this long to get here, and that undoubtedly cost us. The bill was eventually about £2.2 million."

Prime site

The new Motts depot is in a class of its own. Developed specifically for running PCVs, it separates the offices from the workshops, and has a huge parking area.

Sited alongside the canal, on low ground, it poses its own set of drainage and pollution problems which have necessitated a complex pumped drainage system with oil separators and two massive balanced tanks to hold surface water.

From the gate, the offices neatly screen the workshop from view. On two floors, Motts has managed to provide offices for all its major functions, an impressive boardroom, driver rest room, reception, and has space left over for planned expansion - possibly training facilities. Motts runs Distinctive Systems software for all its booking and workshop facilities.

The strength of management has been underpinned with Chris Joel as tours director, responsible for administering all tours-related coach hire both for the UK and abroad, while Roger's son, James, joined in 2004 with a shiny degree from Leeds Met University, and is now using his considerable IT skills as office manager.

The workshops are equally impressive. There are three main bays, one generally dedicated to its brake tester and headlamp alignment, the other two for vehicle maintenance. A fourth, with a pit, multi-tasks as the bodyshop and a secondary maintenance bay, and at 15 metres, double-deck height, is ready for any length of coach.

The workshops - manned by Ian Scutt, chief engineer Martin Lievesly, and six other staff - incorporate the offices and a workshop rest room, plus stores both at ground level and in a mezzanine. The building also houses the main power junctions and other connections, and storage for a huge volume of old paperwork (as demanded by VOSA.)

The bay in which the one-man-operated rolling road brake tester is installed is usually kept free, not least because the fire service uses the facility. Incorporated in the bay is a Krypton smoke analyser for good measure.

The quality of the workshop is summed up by the £250,000 cost of equipping it; even the pit cost £34,000 to install, as it includes gas extractors and a rolling steel shutter-cover which alone cost £8,000.

Outside, new 65,000-litre bunded fuel tanks equipped with Triscan fuel monitoring lie alongside the water tanks.

Core to up-coming business is Motts' approval as a tacho centre, with the facilities to fit and deal with digital tachograph when that eventually arrives.

Time to travel

The Motts business is a two-pronged affair, says Roger, comprising the 'original' Motts Coaches and Motts Leisure Ltd - the touring arm.

Run by Roger's wife Val from Motts Buckingham Street travel office, Motts Leisure accounts for about a quarter of the group's £4 million turnover, hiring its coaches from the Motts fleet.

15 metres and double-deck high. The bodyshop bay

Clockwise, from top: service van stands ready; 65,000 litres of fuel on Triscan system; rolling road brake tester

Though Roger was instrumental in starting the touring work back in 1978, he admits he has little influence on Val's business these days: "We got some decent coaches - Bedford Plaxton Supremes, nearly new - and back then had a separate tours department. But I never had first-hand input. I did do a lot of work on the day trips and used to do some brochure production, but Val runs Motts Leisure," says Roger.

One of Motts' more unusual ventures has been its tie-up with Crusader of Clacton: "It came about as a suggestion of its boss, the late Roger Staines. The idea was that we sell into the Crusader programme and provide vehicles from here as feeders to Thurrock or South Mimms.

"We also do some of Crusaders' tours," says Roger. "We get a 15% commission on sales. It's one of those things; it wouldn't work if it didn't work for both of us, but it has."

Of the remaining work, about 25% is schools - 25 vehicles a day carry pupils - 40% is private hire, and the rest bus work, with two tendered routes.

For a fairly brief period, bus was

> There's a clear niche for 29-seaters with air con and a courier. We can get good money for them as private hire and they're useful for the feeder network

more important to Motts. In 1990, it set up Yellow Bus in response to falls in coach turnover - chiefly the loss of £250,000-worth of factory works contracts. It rapidly built to around 30 vehicles on a combination of tendered and commercial services, and traded five years before it was sold on to Luton and District, later to become the Arriva The Shires company.

Pick of the vehicles

Motts has a simple plan for its vehicle buying - it aims to spend around £400,000 to £500,000 per year, cascading its vehicles.

A prime example would be its 1990 Jonckheere Deauville: "We bought that vehicle new and equipped it as the Wycombe Wanderers FC team coach. After it had provided that service, it was decommissioned as a 53-seater on private hire, and is now a schools vehicle. We aim to keep our coaches a minimum five years. I may have to look at that, partly because I don't ever see the B12Bs being good schools vehicles."

The fleet is chiefly based on Volvo product, partly because they have proven reliable, and partly because Ian Scutt says they are practical to work on.

"I'm pleased with the Sitcar Belugas we got from Moseley PCV. Moseleys have impressed us by ensuring any teething problems have been very quickly sorted out," said Roger.

"There's a clear niche for 29-seaters with air con and a courier. We can get good money for them on private hire and they're useful for the feeder network."

When I had arrived at Motts, Roger's first words were: "You know, we're just a general coach operator." The net result of changing with the times and keeping a broad range of work is now a depot which gives hope to 'general coach operators' everywhere.

The Motts fleet

2	1995	Volvo B12R Jonckheere Monaco d-d
1	1999	Neoplan Skyliner d-d
2	2003	Volvo B12B Transbus Panther
1	2004	Volvo B12B Transbus Panther
1	2005	Volvo B12B Plaxton Panther
1	2001	B10M Jonckheere Mistral
1	2000	Volvo B10M Plaxton Paragon
1	2000	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Mistral
2	1999	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Mistral
3	1998	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Mistral
3	1995	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Deauville
1	1994	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Deauville
2	1993	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Deauville
1	1992	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Deauville
1	1990	Volvo B10M Jonckheere Deauville
2	1999	Volvo B7 Transbus Prima
1	1998	Volvo B7 Transbus Prima
1	1999	Volvo B9M Jonckheere Mistral
1	1996	Volvo B9M Van Hool
6	1988	Leyland Tiger
2	1989	MCW Metrobus
1	1988	Leyland Olympian
1	1985	Leyland Olympian
1	2005	Mercedes 0815D
1	2003	Mercedes 0815D
1	2002	Mercedes 0815D
1	1998	Mercedes 0814D
1	1997	Mercedes 711D
1	1995	Mercedes 711D

Uniting nations

CBW technical editor Martin Cole braves sub-zero temperatures as he meets a Brazilian in charge of a Swedish firm's Polish enterprise...

The traffic on the way to Stansted was a nightmare, my flight was delayed and now I'm finally here in Wroclaw it's bloody freezing. It's more than chilly even for a man acclimatised to Lincolnshire's bracing winds, so I wonder what Volvo's Roberto Teixeira makes of it. The man in charge of the firm's Wroclaw production hails from Brazil, land of samba, beach soccer and tiny thongs. Wear a thong here and you'll get frostbite in some very unpleasant places.

The South American's involvement is indicative of just how multinational firms like Volvo have become in a relatively short space of time.

Volvo expanded its global production strategy into central Europe in 1993 starting off in a very small way by collaborating with Polish bus and coach builder Jelcz.

Spotting considerable potential in the region, the company invested US $20m in developing a new facility in Wroclaw. Initially dedicated to building trucks, the factory opened in 1995 and a year later embarked on a joint venture with Carrus (now Volvo owned) to bring bus and coach production on board.

Wroclaw, Poland's fourth largest city with a population of 637,500, offered a willing and skilled workforce combined with reasonable highway communications between Germany and the Ukraine - providing a gateway to western and eastern Europe.

Production centred on Volvo's 7000 series city and intercity buses, the 8700 bus range and later took on the lion's share of 9700 coaches following another major investment of US $50m.

Potentially, the Wroclaw facility had a capacity for up to 1,100 complete vehicles per year - aided by the ending of truck production in 2001. But, by 2002 it was competing for space with a separate enterprise, Volvo Compact Equipment - producing back-hoe loaders for the construction industry - and in 2003 from Volvo Parts. Further pressure was put on the site in 2004 by the opening of Volvo Business Services and in 2005 by Volvo Logistics and Volvo IT.

Restricted now to just four lines of production the factory is turning out around 3.5 coaches per week and 8.5 buses. Under the control of Brazilian Roberto Teixeira, Wroclaw is run in a highly efficient manner in order to maximise its limited space and is beginning to call out for expansion. He believes he can ramp up production slightly within the coming months but does not see coach production exceeding 180 units or buses getting beyond 550 per year.

The lines producing intercity buses and 9700 coaches adjust their cycles depending on the time of year. As both markets peak at different times it means sometimes there are many more coaches in production than intercity vehicles, and the opposite is true at other times.

Mr Teixeira said planning the production schedules throughout Volvo's global manufacturing outlets more effectively had seen a major turnaround in efficiency and profitability. Although output could sometimes be restricted at Wroclaw it was possible to feed additional coaches into the build programme at Carrus.

He maintained that producing vehicles in different locations had little bearing on quality. All in-house products used identical materials and components - all sourced through the same channels, and the staff at Carrus were already experienced in producing 9700 models.

Mike Ball, managing director of Volvo Bus in the UK, said operators were concerned about keeping the wheels turning and with a vehicle completely covered by the Volvo spare parts and back-up division, coaches anywhere could be attended by expert field engineers with access to the correct

Volvo's Polish factory in Wroclaw is well situated for servicing local markets and is a gateway to both eastern and western Europe

Above: Volvo's 9700 Prestige Plus – a whole product under a single branding. Below: 9700 build procedures are carried out in a clean hi-tech environment by a skilled workforce

> **Operators are concerned with keeping wheels turning. The 9700 will help them achieve it**
>
> Mike Ball, MD Volvo Bus UK

parts, either off the shelf or with the operator by 0900hrs the next morning. The whole vehicle is covered by the same manufacturer warranty.

Underframe components are supplied to the Polish factory in knock-down form and the running gear and drivetrain added once the front and rear modules are united.

The 9700 relies on the B12B rear-engined layout and most are now supplied with a power output of 420bhp and Volvo's I-Shift gearbox. Currently it measures 12.2m long on two axles and there is a longer model under development in right-hand drive which will have three axles. Tri-axle 9700s are in production at Wroclaw but it is not expected the UK market will see one before the end of this year and certainly not before Euro IV has manifested itself. Volvo plans to have a left-hand drive triaxle 9700 on its stand at the NEC to introduce UK operators to its potential.

9700 in the UK

Volvo Bus took a tentative step towards introducing the 9700 to the UK - ordering a batch of 20 vehicles. One was specially kitted out in Volvo Ocean Race livery and another is currently seeing use on a busy demonstration schedule. The step quite quickly justified itself when an order for 10 was placed by Callinan Coaches - kickstarting the process in a very positive way. Tommy Callinan quickly snapped up the 9700 Prestige Plus 'Plus' in Ocean Race livery as part of the deal and plans on using it on golfing excursions in Ireland later this year.

What particularly appeals about the 9700 is Volvo's one-stop shop offering chassis and body with great back-up

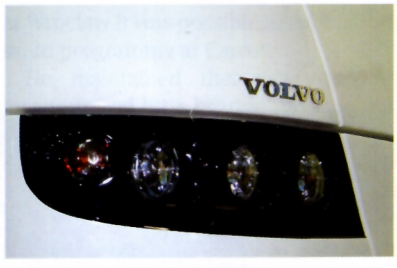
Tommy Callinan, MD Callinan Coaches

The Plus 'Plus' carries an executive specification with 34 multi-adjustable Kiel leather seats. It has five tables fitted with power supplies for electronic equipment and all seats have headset sockets offering aircraft-style multi-audio channels. Forward and rear facing TFT monitors are included within the Sound and Vision entertainment package. A dashboard mounted camera allows the tour guide to appear on the monitors when speaking, thus increasing the interaction with passengers. Other features include a toilet, floor-mounted storage, fridge, a vacuum cleaner system and a wardrobe.

Additional features include Dynafleet Online, Volvo's GPS-based vehicle management system, which monitors information such as vehicle location, fuel consumption, driver's hours and service intervals to optimise fleet and driver control and reduce operating expenses.

The remainder are configured with 49 seats and all are expected to be in service by the end of this month. Much of their work will come from contracts from Bus Éireann and CIE and some will carry Bus Éireann colours. Coaches being used on the independent tour operator programmes will remain in white.

Tommy Callinan recently visited Volvo's Wroclaw factory. He commented: "We run a 100% Volvo fleet, all on Volvo B12B chassis. What particularly appeals about the 9700 is that Volvo now provides a one-stop-shop offering both chassis and body with great back-up, not only from them but also from Irish Commercials."



Top: part of an order for ten 9700 Prestige coaches, the Ocean Race Prestige Plus 'Plus' will carry out executive golfing excursions for Callinan Coaches. Centre: typical 9700 specification. Below: a 13.7m triaxle Prestige is under development for the UK

Top: MPK's main depot in Wroclaw. Left: workshops are well-equipped. Right: a Volvo-powered Jelcz articulated bus –typical on the streets of Wroclaw. Lower right: a modern Volvo 8700 bus displays the all-over advertising that helps fund the operation

MPK

One of Volvo's key customers in Poland is MPK – Miejskie Przedsiebiorstwo Komunikacyjne (we'll stick with MPK...) – which is the local municipal undertaking in Wroclaw. MPK was formed in 1945 but there is a history of public transportation in the city dating back to 1840. The roots of the company lie in a state-owned organisation but the operation turned into a city-owned municipal and became MPK after the end of WWII – although the city was then part of the Eastern Bloc and was, for many years, called Bresslau.

Typical of many European cities, the operator runs a mixture of buses and trams and has, more recently introduced minibuses to cater for disabled passengers. It draws its revenue from fares, selling advertising space on the buses and through its digital communications network.

Daily requirement is for 181 trams and 266 buses. The tramlines cover a total of 932km enabling the running of 45 routes – 13 of which are maintained at night. The bus services cover 278km and is divided into 28 routes. The fleet encompasses 319 buses housed at two depots in the city. There are 160 single deck and midibuses and 159 articulated buses. Volvo has over half the complement with 179 vehicles. Out of the total there are 215 lowfloor buses and the average vehicle age is around 8.5 years. Everything complies with Euro 1, 2, or 3 standards and the remaining older vehicles are all fitted with exhaust cataysers. The fleet switched to using city diesel some time ago and experiments are being carried out with bio-diesel. Seven buses are engaged in a trial with the revised fuel.

Another batch of Volvo buses is currently on order, signifying there is still sufficient funding available to maintain a young fleet age profile. The aim is to bring the average age down to 6.5 years by 2008 but MPK is not placing all its resources into new buses. It also has the capability to fully refurbish buses on site and three is a programme of upgrading which is ongoing.

Trams are also being refurbished and replaced in the same manner. Four new trams were purchased last year and four the year before. Now MPK has 17 lowfloor trams on order from Skoda. These will be almost double the length of the existing two-car units and they are conventional at the front and rear but the centre two carriages have single-step entrances and completely flat floors.

In a bid for more efficiency and reliability, MPK is also aiming to take over control of the electricity sub-stations wich provide the power for the transport systems in Wroclaw. The company believes ownership would help speed the modernisation and upgrades required to run the newer trams. MPK also feels if it had control it could respond to system failures much more quickly than an organisation less focused on delivering public transport services. Therefore, any repairs would be carried out as an absolute priority and minimise downtime and disruption.

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CBW news editor Andrew Peace

No kidding

When *CBW* news editor Andrew Peace joined Reynolds Diplomat on the school run for a day it was scarier than he could ever have imagined...

I had not realised what a cold job coach driving is. We're sitting here at 0715hrs in a coach that is barely warmed up itself, having been out of the yard for only 10 minutes. The door is wide open because every time Val the driver tries to shut it another little face appears wanting to be let onboard. The icy blast is going straight up my trouser leg. First impressions: I don't think I'm going to like this very much.

I'm here because Reynolds Diplomat has kindly invited me to experience coaching at the sharp end - the school run. The firm is really busy with new contracts so I've lucked in to a ride on its new tri-axle Setra S416 GT-HD, so it's not all bad. The kids are OK too, as impressed with the classy coach as I am: "Can we have this one every day please?" lots of them chirrup as they get on.

The coach is soon full, so I'm relegated - not a problem - to the courier seat. It's warmed up quite a bit, the extremely polite kids are chatting happily away with each other and Val, and I've got a great view of the road ahead. I'm just starting to chill out when we pull up outside a religious school in Kingsbury.

Things have changed since I was a boy that's all I can say. For one thing classes start ridiculously early, and the kids travel in a much better standard of vehicle, but is it normal for schools to be ringed with concrete and bullet-proof glass bunkers these days?

I am not joking - we stop at a check point and a guard boards the coach and demands to know who I am. He barks my name letter-by-letter into his walkie-talkie. It's obviously not a credit check they are running because I quickly get the all-clear and we drive up to the entrance and off-load. The kids seem completely unfazed that they go to school inside a fortress and trip happily off the coach.

The next job is much more like what I was expecting. We draw up outside the school gates and a class gets on. We drop them at the swimming pool, go back to the school, pick up another class, take them to the swimming pool then collect the previous lot and so on.

All these kids are tiny tots so we're not expecting any trouble, even so they amuse themselves flapping the gas-strutted seatback tables up and down, until Val shouts over her shoulder for them to stop. Which they do for a minute until, like amnesiac goldfish, they start doing it all over again.

The morning passes in a whirl and before I know it we're back at Reynolds' central Watford depot having lunch. ›

> The atmosphere is tense, there's a feeling that anything could happen at any minute...

Reynolds is in the middle of mailing out its new tour brochure. Sixteen thousand were delivered on Monday afternoon and, by Wednesday lunchtime, with all hands on deck, just the last few are left. I do my little bit while I'm waiting for the afternoon shift to start.

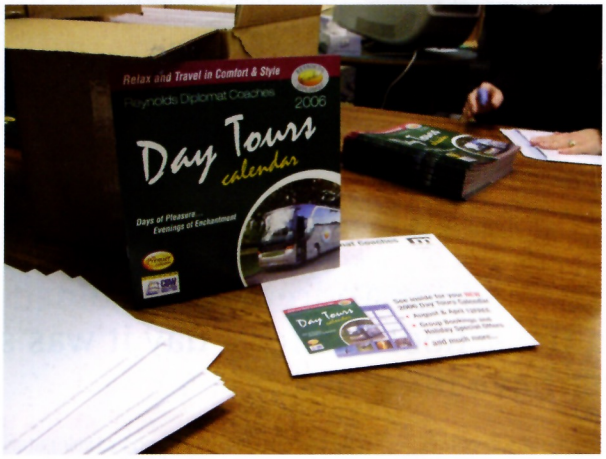
For the afternoon I'm with driver Peter, on a Neoplan decker, and it's a much tougher proposition this time. These kids are notoriously noisy and badly behaved.

Val told me about a typical incident on the morning run the previous day when one of the kids smeared his lunch all over the seats and down the staircase. He was stupid enough to boast about it as he got off and Val collared him, but what can she do? The school does not apparently take much notice of complaints from drivers.

Rubbing my hands together at the prospect of some proper war-zone type reporting, Peter and I cook up a plan to catch the kids unawares, so they are not put off by somebody 'official' looking sat on the vehicle.

I wait down the hill until he has picked them up, and then sidle down the side of the coach and into the open door as it waits in traffic. I think the kids must have spotted me because it's spookily quiet, but Peter says they have been like that since the journey started.

He thinks it could be a hangover from an incident the week before: a bunch of lads, from another school, were waiting behind a wall for the coach to come past and, at the last second, lobbed a tyre into the road. Peter says he is always half expecting something to happen - his previous job driving tanks in Bosnia comes in handy - and he managed to avoid it, but everybody on board was shaken up.



No rest for the wicked: Andrew chipped in with a bit of envelope stuffing. Top: Another glamorous day at the sharp end of coaching... Only a few hundred to go...

The atmosphere is tense, there's a feeling that anything could happen at any minute. In fact the whole trip is so quiet that soon we begin to wonder if there is something really serious going on. But no, apart from an open sunroof, there's not even a smell of cigarette smoke when we check the upstairs after dropping the last one off.

The last run of the day is to a posh private boys school. The student car park puts the teachers to shame - I see three Mercedes Sports Coupes - but the kids going home on the bus today have something to boast about too. I'm back with Val and the Setra.

These were the worst kids of the day without doubt - smart-arse teenagers with cast-iron self confidence - lippy and back-chatty.

I go down the back and ask them what they think of the coach, and school transport in general, and we play the 'guess how much the coach cost?' competition. They start off at £40,000 and are amazed when I tell them it's worth the best part of £250,000. They are wildly impressed for about half a second, then they go back to their Gameboys.

Nothing of interest to say about school transport, bless them, they are completely unaware of the political and environmental storm raging above their carefully gelled heads.

Being here has brought home to me that there is much more to being a coach driver than negotiating a massive vehicle around pokey streets, at least on the school run.

Coach drivers have all the responsibility, but none of the power - beyond sheer force of personality - that other '*in loco parentis*' professionals do. That's not fair.

Being in charge of an expensive, sophisticated vehicle - yes please. In charge of the nation's finest, with little or no back up - no thanks.

Peter Woodhouse is a partner in the Bond Pearce Transport team and deals regularly with road and passenger transport issues. He is a specialist advocate with full rights to appear in all courts and tribunals in the UK. Peter has a particular interest in employment matters in the transport sector. He can be contacted on 0117 929 9197 or by email *pwoodhouse@bondpearce.com*

Further pain in Spain

Legal expert Peter Woodhouse on how to avoid being clobbered with a hefty fine when visiting the continent

Peter Woodhouse

Readers who operate coaches on the continent will be all too familiar with the threat of over-zealous enforcement authorities issuing spot fines to UK-based coaches and drivers.

In this week's update we examine some of the current problems facing UK operators and also warn of imminent new threats to the industry.

At present, UK operators face a veritable administrative nightmare trying to ensure that both their vehicles and drivers are fit and 'legal' to drive on the continent. In addition to the standard tax, and maintenance issues, UK operators working in Europe also need to consider variable speed limits, the threat of illegal immigrants trying to gain access to their vehicles and the increasingly stringent enforcement of tachograph rules and regulations.

Back in 2001, fines imposed on company drivers carrying stowaways were branded as 'legislative overkill' following the imposition of legislation allowing spot fines of £2,000 to be levied per stowaway.

Despite complaints from operators that the legislation was unduly harsh, it took over 7,000 cases and £14m in fines to have been imposed before the High Court in London deemed that the regulations were in breach of European law.

Of particular concern in recent years has been the similar treatment of drivers failing to produce tachograph-related documentation. Most operators now ensure that the last eight days tachograph charts are available for inspection or, in the event that a driver has not been driving in this period, an official letter of attestation by the operator confirming this.

Failure to produce these documents will normally lead to a vehicle being impounded until a deposit is paid. The deposit normally reflects the maximum fine for such an offence in that jurisdiction and will secure the immediate release of the vehicle. The problem for UK-based operators is how they recover the substantial deposit paid. The problem here stems from the fact that the 'deposit' is not returned by the relevant authority.

Instead operators are given the option to either accept the payment of the deposit as the fine, or to write in providing mitigation/evidence to dispute the fine within a defined time period.

If the 'deposit' is contested the matter may (but not always) be listed in the relevant court jurisdiction for a hearing similar to a matter being listed in the UK equivalent magistrates' court.

Worse still for operators is the recent news that the Spanish authorities have confirmed that they have instructed police services to check that all coaches and goods vehicles registered in the EU member state after January 1 2006 are equipped with digital tachographs.

Those still equipped with an analogue system will now be subject to a fine of between €4,600 and €6,000 (£3-4,000).

The news offers little cheer for an industry finding itself increasingly scrutinised both at home and now abroad.

> **Spanish authorities have instructed police to check that all coaches registered after January 1, 2006 have digital tachographs**

Make sure...

- All tachograph records are available
- That you provide letters of attestation in the language of the relevant country for all drivers
- All vehicles are roadworthy
- All vehicle documents are safely filed with the vehicle
- Regular maintenance and defect checks are undertaken on the vehicle whilst away
- If you are in doubt, seek specialist legal advice

New tachograph legislation could end up costing you thousands of pounds on a continental trip

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Volvo B12M/ Plaxton Panther
Engine: Volvo
Transmission: I-Shift
Seats: 36
Spec: leather Fainsa seats, three point belts, audio-DVD, large floor mounted toilet, servery and cloak-room, air conditioning
Bought from: Plaxton

WA SHEARINGS GRAND TOURER

Tours giant WA Shearings has completed its new vehicle intake with the purchase of 10 Plaxton-bodied Volvo B12Ms, which join 10 similar coaches bodied by Van Hool (*CBW*, January 5).

The new Plaxton Panthers are all destined for continental touring. Five are 36-seaters to the new Grand Tourer specification, and five are 42-seaters to WA Shearings' Premier Class specification. Both types of vehicles will be used on WA Shearings' extensive European holiday tours programme, and are all air conditioned and fitted with floor-mounted toilets.

The new Grand Tourer specification builds upon the success of the Wallace Arnold branding, first introduced in 2002, with the latest leather upholstered Fansia seats, three-point belts and an audio-DVD sound system. The company has deleted the five-seater lounge at the rear of the WA version to provide a very large floor-mounted toilet and cloakroom, with the servery moving round to the nearside.

Altogether 35 GT coaches will be used this year, with 15 of them being new this season. The Plaxton delivery continues the company's policy of dual-sourcing, and follows the purchase of 10 European specification coaches last year. "Both Shearings and Wallace Arnold had a long history of operating Plaxton coaches," said WA Shearings transport director Jimmy King. "We added 10 Premier Class Panthers to our fleet last year. They performed extremely well and gave us confidence to repeat the order for 2006."

Managing director John Slatcher told *CBW* the Grand Tourer programme had now been separated from the main brochure and featured higher quality hotels. "The WA concept was to offer 48 seat continental tours with certain departures being offered with GT coaches with a price supplement" he said. "We have taken the whole tour experience further, and now offer a higher quality product at a significantly higher price.

"Grand Tourer holidays are booking quite well, at this stage," he said.

"For example, the Russia tours had 99 bookings last year, and this year we already have 499, and

WA SHEARINGS PREMIER CLASS

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body: Volvo B12M/ Plaxton Panther
Engine: Volvo
Transmission: I-Shift
Seats: 42
Spec: air conditioning, toilet
Bought from: Plaxton Coach Sales, 01909 551166

Plaxton's Steve Pickup hands over the keys to Stewarts MD Andy Cotton

STEWARTS OF MORTIMER

Six new Plaxtons going into Stewarts of Mortimer, near Reading, represent the biggest investment in the operator's history.

The two new Paragons are based on the Dennis R-series chassis, one with 49 seats destined for a range of work including a growing portfolio of corporate customers, and the other a 57-seater for high-capacity work.

The four remaining new vehicles are Plaxton Cheetahs on the popular Mercedes-Benz Vario chassis - two with 29 seats to executive specification, and the other pair 33-seaters.

Started in 1984, Stewarts is run by MD Andy Cotton - pictured getting the keys from Plaxton's Steve Pickup - who says he's had a policy of using Dennis-based large coaches: "We use Dennis for our full-sized vehicles and Mercedes-Benz for the small coaches," he said. "The Cummins/ ZF combination in the R-Series is a good package. And we have excellent relations with Plaxton."

The purchase gives Stewarts 11 vehicles in total: "Replacing half our fleet with new vehicles is a clear statement to our customers that we are a strong and growing business," said Mr Cotton, who has previously sourced late used vehicles from Plaxton's Anston sales outlet.

FACT FILE

Chassis/Body: Dennis R/Plaxton Paragon. M-B Vario/Cheetah
Engine: Cummins/M-B
Transmission: ZF manual
Seats: 57/49 and 33/29
Spec: Varying
Bought from: Plaxton Coach Sales, 01909 551166

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

Zarges UK has developed a new adjustable-height access platform designed to simplify the tasks of maintenance engineers working on high-sided vehicles.

Lightweight and highly mobile, the platform is mounted on rubber tyred, swivelling castor wheels which lock firmly when the platform is correctly positioned. The platform itself can be raised or lowered by manual winches either side of the framework.

Access to the platform is via two ladders – both fitted with handrails. A guardrail surrounds the workspace on the platform and the access gates are spring-loaded and self closing.

■ ***www.zargesuk.co.uk***
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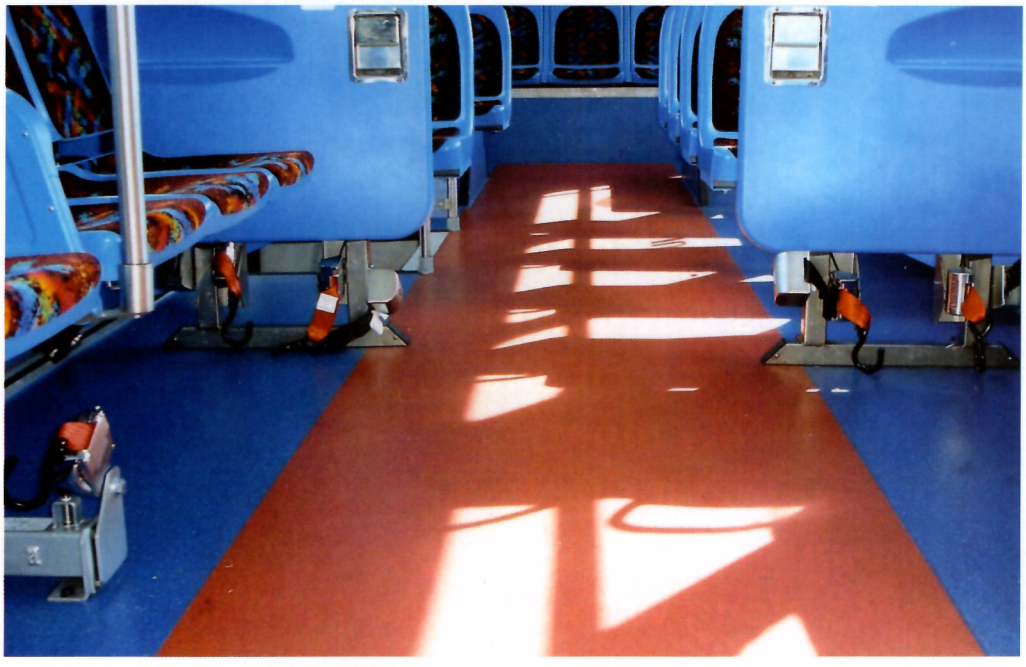


ALTRO CRACKS US FLOORING PROBLEMS

Non-slip flooring material specialist Altro Transflor has made a breakthrough in the USA with both passengers and staff at Monroe Transit System in Louisiana.

The company ordered four new Gillig Phantom 35' buses and was keen to specify the Altro Chroma material in contrasting red and blue shades of Flame and Wave. Its striking appearance and practical simplicity – already enjoyed by most European operators – has appealed to passengers by brightening up the saloon environment and to staff because it is easy to clean and its welded seams don't allow water seepage which previously caused problems with the sub-floor structures.

Grooves cut into the surface of the previously used rubberised flooring material were notoriously difficult to clean.

Monroe Transit System general manager Joseph Comerford said: "The new look has really made a big difference in changing public opinion towards public transit and helping to entice passengers aboard."

■ **www.altrotransflor.com Call: 01462 489263**

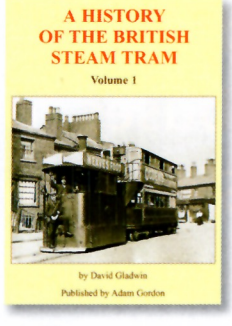
Chris Haynes, managing director of GreenChem UK, with Tony Garner, service and operations director of Keyfuels

FUEL SPECIALIST BEGINS ADBLUE SERVICE

Fuel bunkering specialist Keyfuels has begun to introduce AdBlue stocks across its storage network.

Aimed at providing a complete fuelling service for operators running Euro IV engines with SCR exhaust aftertreatment systems, the urea-based additive is now available at Crawley Crossing re-fuelling bunker on the M1 near Bedford. The move is in conjunction with GreenChem and it is planned to ensure AdBlue is available at all the 1,000-strong Keyfuels sites across the country.

Standard keyfuels or Diesel Direct cards will be reconfigured to enable purchase of AdBlue from these sites. ■ ***www.keyfuels.co.uk www.greenchemadblue.com***



STEAM TRAMS UNCOVERED

Author David Gladwin has taken a highly-detailed look at the mechanical and social history of the British steam tram in his book called, naturally, *A History of the British Steam Tram*.

The British steam tram had its heyday between 1885 and 1895, briefly bridging the gap between horsedrawn trams and the development of electric trams.

The history is far from a romantic nostalgia viewed through rose-tinted glasses and uncovers a world of corruption, exploitation of cheap 'slave' labour, tragedies and accidents.

The complete work will be published in five volumes.

Volume one was released in 2004 but volume two is shortly for publication and concentrates on tramway companies A-B. It covers 13 tramway operations. Volume three will cover operations C-R and Volume four will feature companies S-W.

The final work will contain a collection of documents, Board of Trade returns, detailed reports on mechanical tramway traction, petitions supporting the use of steam, select committee reports, accident reports, innercity acts and bylaws.

Volume 1 costs £40 plus £4 post and packing.

■ **Write to: Adam Gordon, Kintradwell Farmhouse, Brora, Sutherland KW9 6LU. Call: 01408 622660**
E-mail: *adam@adamgordon.freewire.co.uk*

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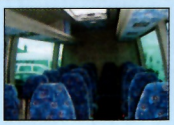

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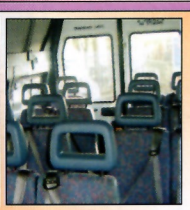

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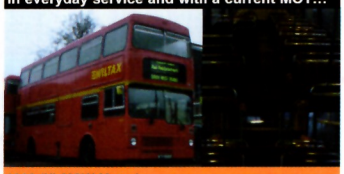

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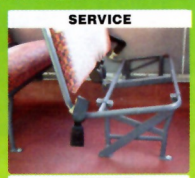

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Two minute interview

Name: Michael Stevens
Occupation: Director of global leisure sales, Accor Hotel Group
Is the PSV industry on its way up, down or static? Indications are that it's on the decline, but operators with flair will always succeed. Current problems will level out.
Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? Drivers' hours changes to the 12-day rule will have a serious effect on European touring in particular.
Give the industry's business managers 20 words of helpful advice... Think positive, think ahead, use your initiative and don't be frightened of taking a risk.
Who, in the last 50 years, has been most influential in the industry and why? Dave Parry of Parrys International. He created a very strong tour business everyone would love to copy, but he has stuck within the limits of what he thinks works. He's gone for what he knows best.
Which vehicle – coach, bus, motorcycle or car – do you love the most, and why? Range Rover Sport – I've got one, and it's just amazingly capable.
If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute? Everyone says I start work too early – often before 6am – but their problem with that is that I expect everyone else to be there with me.
Who would play you in the film version of the story of your life?: Donald Sinden (actually, I said Robert De Niro, but one of my colleagues overruled me!).
Who would you have as your co-star? Julia Roberts.

Reading role is Philled

Reading Transport has strengthened its senior management team, appointing Phil Lightowler as Newbury Buses manager.

Phil, 37, brings over 15 years experience in both operational management and strategic development in the transport industry.

He said; "I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities at Newbury, and to help Newbury Buses continue to deliver a high level of service to its customers."

Sam Simpson, Reading Transport's operations director said: "We welcome Phil to the senior management team. We look forward to his positive contribution in moving Newbury Buses forward on to a new plane of operational excellence and innovation in the consistent delivery of good quality services to our customers and important contractors such as Vodafone, Greenham Common and West Berkshire Council."

Starting his career as a management trainee in the bus industry for the group that later became First, Phil has also been an area manager within the bus industry and worked in the logistics sector for Marks & Spencer.

Phil Lightowler

Rees bows out

Lyndon Rees

Lyndon Rees MBE has retired as managing director of Citybus and New World First Bus, Hong Kong.

Sixty-seven year old Lyndon is the last founding director of Citybus and has been the firm's MD since 1980.

He assumed the additional responsibility of New World First Bus in 2004 with a combined fleet of 1600 buses.

In 1969 he left Western Welsh in Cardiff and headed east to take a position with the Hong Kong Government Transport Department until 1970, when he was invited to become traffic manager of China Bus Motors, which he left in 1980 to establish Citybus.

Heard to retire

Stephen Heard

Stephen Heard, head of media relations at the CPT, is to take voluntary early retirement from March 31.

He has been in post for five and a half years, on secondment from the Department for Transport. In total he has worked in the civil service for 32 years which, he says, is long enough for anybody, continuing: "I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work at CPT, and will miss many aspects of daily life in Imperial House, especially the friendship of colleagues and of my contacts in industry

Mike Parker

Chair role for Parker

Mike Parker, director general of Nexus, the firm behind the Newcastle and Sunderland subway system, has also been appointed the first chairman of the new Northumberland Tourism organisation.

Mike commented: "I'm honoured and delighted to have been selected as the first Chair of Northumberland Tourism. Northumberland is a beautiful part of the world and richly deserves to be one of the top rural tourist destinations in the UK. With our combined commitment, hard work and passion for the area, that vision should become a reality and everyone who lives and works here can benefit."

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Mr P Beavin, Public Transport Manager, Joint Public Transport Group, Belmont House Rectory Lane, Guisborough TS14 7FD. Fax: (01287) 612520. E-mail: public_transport@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk

For further information, telephone Paul Beavin on (01287) 612529 or Ian Fotherby on (01287) 612528.

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

Yorkshire and Humberside Public Sector Group – Regional Transport Provision

The **Y**orkshire and **H**umberside **P**ublic **S**ector **G**roup is seeking expressions of interest for providing a five-year contract for transporting asylum seekers into the Yorkshire and Humber Region from other parts of the UK.

Interested parties can download the pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) from the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) website at www.counciltenders.net. Once logged on, please enter the Scheme ID 504894 in the scheme ID field located in the left navigation panel.

If you are unable to access the website, please contact, Corporate Procurement Unit at the Civic Hall on 0113 247 4007 or email: lets.support@leeds.gov.uk. The deadline for receipt of completed PQQ's is **Noon on 10th April 2006.**

The YHPSG is a partnership of ten local authorities responsible for supporting asylum seekers in the region.

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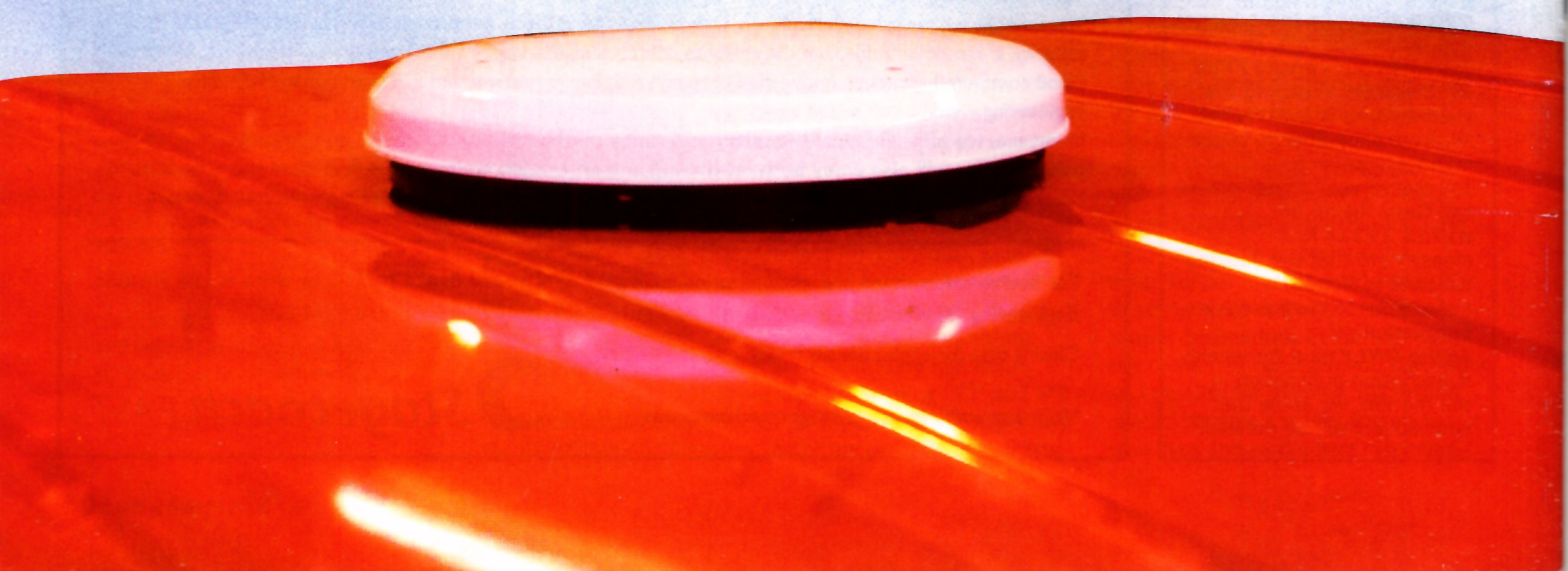
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